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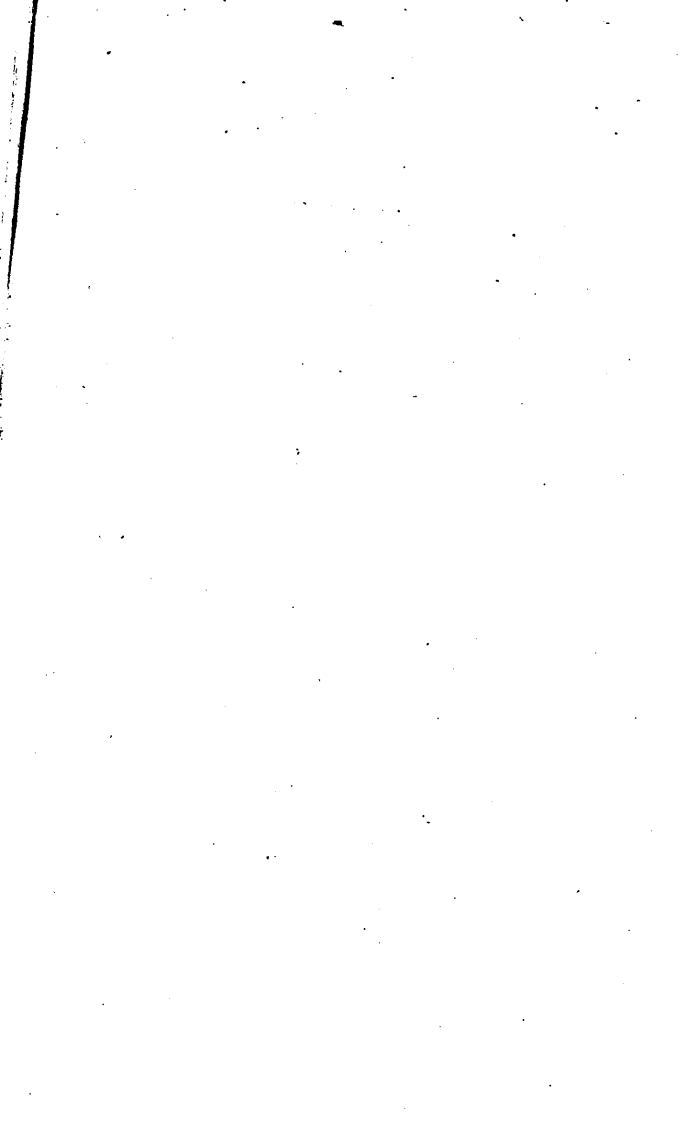
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# CHRISTIANITY.

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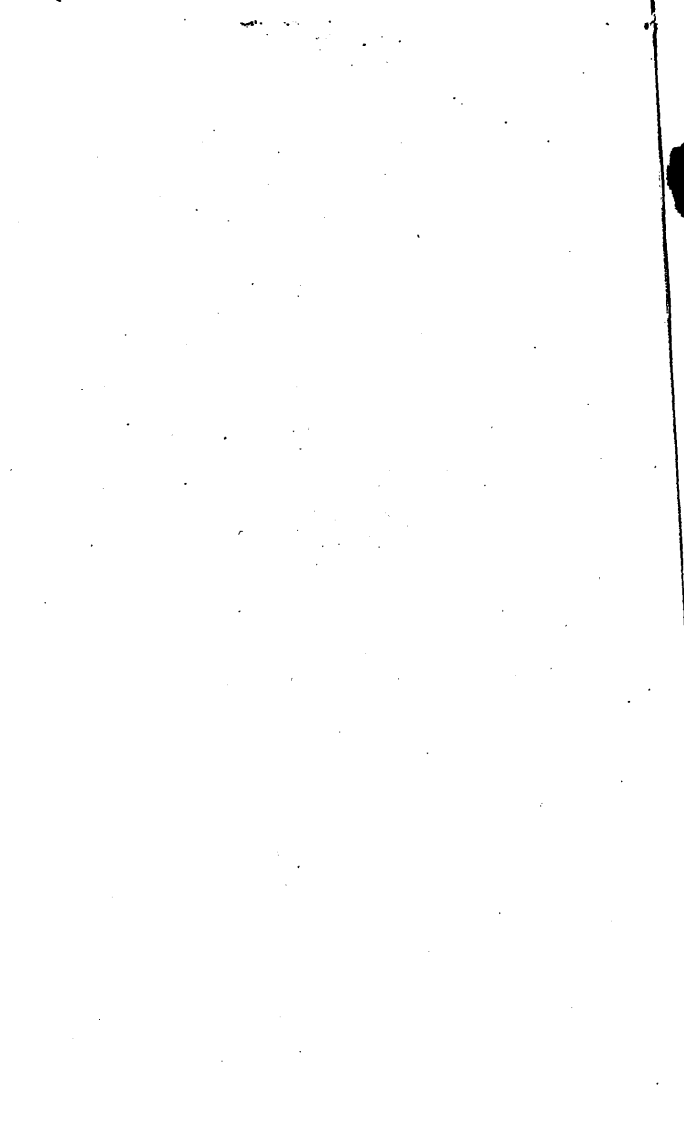
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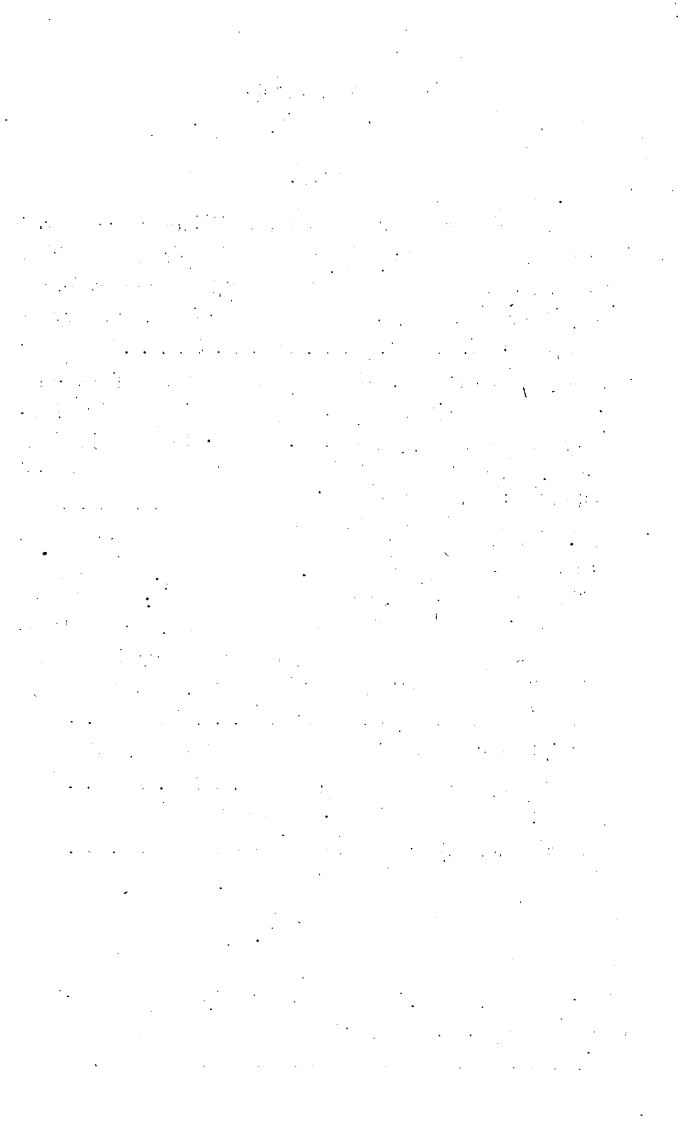
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**A  
PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE  
ON  
THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY:  
WITH  
A SHORT ACCOUNT  
OF  
THE TREATISES WHICH THESE VOLUMES CONTAIN.  
BY  
ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.  
PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT  
PRINCETON, N. J.**

**13**





## PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

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WHATEVER may be the truth in regard to religion, it must be admitted to be the most important subject which can possibly occupy the thoughts of a rational creature. It cannot be wise to treat it, as many have done, with levity and ridicule: for even on the supposition that there is no true religion, it is a serious thing that it has got such a hold of the human mind, that it cannot be shaken off; so that men of the noblest powers of intellect and the highest moral courage have been subdued and led captive by its impressions. And they who boast a complete exemption from its influence, and glory in the name of atheist or sceptic, do nevertheless often betray a mind ill at ease, and in the extremity of their distress are sometimes heard to call upon that God whose existence they have denied, and to implore that mercy which they have been accustomed to deride. It has been said, that atheists are of all men the most afraid of invisible powers: they tremble at their own shadow, and are averse to be left alone in the dark. They seem to be haunted with a secret apprehension that the reality of religion will at some moment flash upon their conviction. It is with them a common saying, that "fear made the gods;" but it would be much more true to assert, that fear made atheists; for what but the dread of a Supreme Being could be a motive strong enough to lead men to contend so earnestly against the existence of God? Few men, even among the irreligious, are willing to be reckoned atheists. Indeed, a man should first take leave of his reason before he advocates an opinion demonstrated to be false by every thing which we behold. The name deist is doubtless much more honorable than atheist; but many who profess to believe in a great First Cause, have no more religion than the atheist: their faith has no effect upon them, and can have none, because their God is not a PERSON—nor an intelligent voluntary agent, by whom the world was made, but a sort of blind power,

which pervades the universe ; a kind of active principle which exerts itself in ten thousand different ways, but has no existence separate from the universe in which it dwells, and which it moulds and animates. Such a God commands no respect, and inspires no dread. No wonder that deists of this school have no religious feelings, and, except in name, are not in the least distinguished from the blindest atheists. Epicurus did not deny the existence of the gods ; but he took care to invest them with such attributes, and to remove them so far off, as to have no concern whatever in the creation or government of the world. They were consequently not likely to interfere with him in his career of pleasure.

Give the sensualist a God who takes no notice of his conduct, and who possesses no attribute which will lead him to punish the guilty, and he will be well pleased with the idol, and may be disposed to contend for the reality of his existence. It is the JUSTICE of God which drives men from his presence, to hide themselves in the darkness of infidelity. This guilty dread of the Almighty is a sure evidence that man is not in his right condition. An innocent creature would delight in approaching to the Best of Beings.

But, leaving as incorrigible all those who deny the moral government of God, let us see whether they who are advocates for natural religion, are standing on safe and solid ground. It is a plausible argument *a priori*, that God would not place man in this world without furnishing him with the means of knowing, and the ability to perform his duty ; and as reason is his guide in other matters, so reason must be a sufficient guide in matters of religion. But what if man has forsaken the state in which his maker placed him ? We see that he is a free agent, and therefore he may have acted perversely, and brought himself into difficulties out of which he cannot extricate himself. He may, by his own folly, have lost a large portion of that knowledge, with which he was originally endowed. It would be very unreasonable to make this supposition, if nothing but wisdom, rectitude, and purity had ever been observed in the human kind. But when we see how much ignorance, how much palpable error, how much perverseness, how much moral disorder, and how much misery are prevalent among men, we are constrained to admit it to be probable, that the human race stand in need of something more than their own reason to guide them in the way to happiness ; or even to assure them that happiness is attainable.

It is in vain to talk of the powers of nature and the light of reason,

when we see millions of men groping in darkness, and stumbling on the precipice of ruin. Man needs help; he needs instruction; he needs a remedy for the moral disorders of his nature. And here the question occurs, has any remedy been found effectual to remove or mitigate these evils? Has religion been able to do any thing for our race? Alas! in regard to most religions, they have rather aggravated than cured the malady. We plead not for idolatry, in any of its pompous forms: it carries absurdity and impiety in its very face. It binds the soul of man with bonds the most cruel. It degrades him to the dust, and renders him capable of every thing mean and vile. There have been innumerable forms of idolatry; some of which have been more mild and less monstrous than others; but every system of idolatry is an abomination. Towards God it is treason and rebellion; and in relation to man it is defiling and murderous. Cruelty and obscenity have ever been the characteristics of idolatry. Whether such religion is better or worse than blank atheism, we need not stop to dispute. Both evils are deadly; and the choice would be difficult between some forms of superstition and atheism itself.

When we reject all the religions which come under the denomination of Pagan superstition, all of which are idolatrous and demoralizing, we have cast off a large part of what has gone by this name, in all ages of the world; and would to God it were as easy to reject this whole system of absurdity, blood, and vileness from the world, as it is to exclude it from all share in our approbation! Here then is one fact for which the deist should be able to account. It is, that while the world has been for thousands of years overrun with gross idolatry, which has infected the learned and polished, as well as the rude, there have been some nations exempt from this general and debasing evil. Formerly, the small nation of the Jews, though much less learned and refined than the Egyptians, Greeks or Romans, maintained the doctrine of the Unity of God, and the duty of rendering to him spiritual worship and cordial obedience. For nearly two thousand years past other nations have been found, casting off the gross superstitions of Paganism; and at this time, when we cast our eye over the map of the world, we descry some luminous spots from which the darkness of polytheism and gross idolatry has been dispelled. Now it is a fact, obvious to every observer, that the only people in the world who are exempt from gross idolatry are those who have been enlightened by the Bible. I do not

except Mohammedans, for all the best parts of their system were borrowed from the Bible. They are merely a corrupt sect of Christian heretics; for they acknowledge the divine origin of both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, pretending, however, that these are exceedingly corrupted and interpolated.

But let us return to the question which I wish the deist to exercise his ingenuity in solving. It is, how it has happened that the Bible has been the only means of destroying idolatry in the world? This effect is not confined to ancient times: very recently, whole tribes of degraded savages have rejected their idolatrous superstitions, under the influence of Christianity. Look at the Society and Sandwich islands:—look at the converted Greenlanders, Hottentots, Caffres, and Negroes, and explain the strange and happy transformation which has taken place. That must have been a wonderful imposture which has been attended with effects so beneficial to man. It cannot be denied, that Christianity and civilization are nearly related to each other, and that those nations which permit and encourage the free and general reading of the Scriptures, are, everywhere, the foremost in the race of improvement, and in the enjoyment of rational liberty.

It is indeed objected by the deist, that Christianity has been the occasion of innumerable evils;—that it has given rise to wars, and many bloody persecutions. Now, it would be impossible to devise an objection which has less foundation than this. I can hardly persuade myself, that any man who has carefully read the New Testament, can be serious in alleging such things against Christianity. Christ, it is true, did predict that his religion would be the occasion of strife and division, even amongst the nearest relatives; but this not from any thing in itself which naturally tended to produce such evils; but entirely from the wickedness of men, who would set themselves in opposition to the truth, and persecute those who embraced it: a persecution which would be more virulent towards the members of their own families; so that the prediction has often been verified, “a man’s foes shall be those of his own household.” It will also be conceded, that Christianity has often been misunderstood and grossly perverted by its professors; and that under its sacred name, though with an opposite spirit, persecutions have been carried on, the mere recital of which is enough to make us shudder. But who does not see, that, while it is as evident as the noon-day light that this is not the genius of Christianity, the blame of these

evils cannot in justice be charged upon the system? As well might we charge liberty with all the wars and all the misery, occasioned by the contests to maintain or recover this inestimable blessing. Any system, however pure and benevolent, is liable to abuse in the hands of men; and in all such cases, the system cannot be judged by its perversion and abuse, but by an impartial examination of its own genuine principles. Such an investigation Christianity challenges; and indeed a verdict has already been given in her favor, by many of her opposers themselves. They have not been able to resist the wisdom, the purity, and the peaceful tendency of the gospel; so that unwilling praise has been extorted from themselves.

If the Christian religion is "a cunningly devised fable," there are two things relative to it, which can never be satisfactorily accounted for. The one is, that a falsehood should be surrounded with so many of the evidences and circumstances, by which truth is characterized; the other, that an imposture, proceeding from minds exceedingly corrupt, should be marked with such purity in its moral principles, and such a benevolent and peaceful tendency in all its provisions and precepts. Whatever objections may be made to the system of Christianity, these difficulties will stand in the way of the deist; and he never can overcome them.

Let us calmly contemplate this subject. The Christian religion is founded on facts, for the truth of which an appeal is made to testimony,—the ground on which all other ancient facts are received. If these facts did really occur, then Christianity must be true. If they did not, why can it not be shown? Was there ever a case, in which transactions so public, and in the truth of which so many persons were interested, were so circumstanced as to baffle every effort to detect the fraud attempted to be imposed on the world? Here then is a wonderful thing. The defenders of Christianity appeal to facts attested by many competent and credible witnesses; they show that these witnesses could not themselves have been deceived in the nature of the things, concerning which they give their testimony;—they demonstrate from every circumstance of their condition, that they could have had no motive for wishing to propagate the belief of these facts, if they had not been true;—that, in giving the testimony which they did, they put to risk, and actually sacrificed every thing most dear to men;—that, even if they could have been induced by some inconceivable motive to propagate what they knew to be false, it was morally impossible that

they could have persuaded any persons to believe them ; because the things related by them being of a recent date and public nature, and the names of persons and places specified, nothing would have been easier than to disprove false assertions so situated. Moreover, the persons who first became disciples of Christ and members of the church from the declarations of the apostles cannot be supposed to have admitted the truth of these things without examination, for every principle of self-preservation must have been awake to guard them against delusion. By attaching themselves to this new sect "everywhere spoken against," and persecuted both by Jews and Gentiles, they did literally forsake all that man holds most dear in this life. If there had existed no persons possessed of power and sagacity, who were deeply interested in the refutation of falsehoods which would implicate them in disgrace, the evidence would not be so overwhelming as it is ; but we know, that all the power and learning of the Jewish nation, and also of the Roman Government, were arrayed against the publishers of the gospel ; for just in proportion as the report of these men gained credit, the conduct of those who persecuted Christ unto death, would appear clothed in the darkest colors. Why did they not, at once, come forward and crush the imposture ? It has also been fully established by the friends of revelation, that we are in possession of the genuine records published soon after the events occurred. There is no room for any suspicion that the gospels were the fabrication of a later age than that of the apostles ; or that they have been corrupted and interpolated, since they were written. And finally, the effects produced by the publication of these facts are such as almost to constrain the belief, that the gospel narrative is true : for the rapid and extensive progress of the Christian religion can, upon no other principles, be rationally accounted for. It would be as great a miracle for a few unlearned fishermen and mechanics to be successful in founding a religion, which in a short time changed the whole aspect of the world, as any recorded in the New Testament. Now, supposing the facts in question to be true, what other, or greater evidence of their truth could we have had, than we already possess ? What other facts of equal antiquity are half as well attested ? Let the deist choose any portion of ancient history, and adduce his testimony in proof of the facts, and then compare the evidence in their support, with that which the friends of Christianity have exhibited for all the material facts recorded in the gospel ; and I shall

be disappointed if he do not, upon an impartial examination, find the latter to be much more various and convincing.

But these facts are miraculous. This single circumstance is, in the deistical creed, made to outweigh all the clearest evidence which can be adduced. This therefore may be considered the root of the error; for when it comes to be fairly considered, it must appear to be nothing better than an unfounded prejudice. Why should it be considered impossible or unreasonable for God to work a miracle? Every event was a miracle, before any laws of nature were established. The creation of the universe was a magnificent miracle. And if the great author of this system choose occasionally to regulate it by an extraordinary interposition of his power, what principle is violated? Why should human reason so pertinaciously object, as though God had denied himself, or contradicted our reason? But the deist insists, that never having seen miracles performed, we cannot reasonably be expected to credit them, on the report of others. And is it true, that it is unreasonable to believe what we ourselves have never experienced? Upon this principle, the inhabitants of the tropical regions ought never to believe in the existence of snow or ice; and the blind man should obstinately refuse to believe that there is any such thing as vision by the eyes; or the deaf man, that there is any such thing as hearing by the ears. Miracles do require more proof than common events, as do other events of an extraordinary kind, but when testimony of a certain kind and degree is exhibited, the presumption naturally felt against the reality of such events, is readily overcome in every unprejudiced mind. And if any one wishes to disprove the truth of such facts, he must do it by canvassing the evidence, and showing that it is insufficient, or inconsistent and contradictory: or he must bring forward testimony to rebut that which has been exhibited. This is the only rational method of proceeding in such a case; yet it has not been pursued by the opposers of Christianity. There is not to be found in the numerous attacks on the New Testament, a single example of a calm and impartial attempt to prove, by authentic testimony, that such facts as those recorded, never took place. But why has not this been done?

Why have not deists brought forward convincing testimony to prove that these histories are false and unworthy of credit; instead of dealing in irrelevant objections, and throwing out dark suspicions and innuendoes? If the truth is on their side, why have they not



been able to show that a fraud was committed, and a base imposture palmed on the world? The true reason is, that the testimony for the facts recorded in the gospels cannot be impugned by direct attack. There is confessedly no counter testimony. There are no evidences of fraud or ill-design, in the books themselves. The historians appear to be honest men, and continually speak and act as if they had the fullest assurance of what they relate. They resort to no artifice or finesse. They use no arts to gain popularity, or to accommodate themselves to the prejudices of the people. They are so impartial, that they conceal none of those things which were unfavorable to their own character; but freely acknowledge their own faults and errors. Impostors, in the circumstances of the apostles, never could have devised such an artless story; they never could have concealed so perfectly their own true character and design; and they could never have produced compositions of so great excellence. Let any man compare the genuine gospels with those spurious ones which were afterwards circulated, under the names of the apostles and apostolic men, and he will be struck with the remarkable difference; and yet, as far as relates to natural abilities and learning, it is probable, that these latter writers were fully equal to the evangelists. It is truly wonderful, that uneducated men should have written histories so dignified, unimpassioned, simple, and free from weaknesses and puerilities. Nothing can be farther removed from an artfully contrived imposture, than the gospels of the four Evangelists.

But let us, for a moment, assume the hypothesis, that the Christian religion is a cunningly devised fable. Let us take the ground occupied by the deist, and let us reason on the subject, upon these principles. And here we are at liberty to suppose any one of several things, still taking it for granted, that the whole narrative is false, so far as miracles are concerned. In the first place, then, let us suppose that no such person as Jesus Christ ever lived upon the earth; but that the whole history from beginning to end is a forgery. The difficulty on this hypothesis will be to account for the existence of the Christian church, and for the reception of the gospels as true history; for, fix on what period you please, as that in which the impostor began to publish the narrative respecting the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, it would seem altogether impossible, when the circumstances are well considered, to conceive, how such an enterprise should succeed. Indeed, upon this supposition, the

New Testament would have carried its own refutation on its face; for it testifies that the church began to be gathered immediately upon the death of Jesus Christ, and had its commencement at Jerusalem. Now on the foregoing hypothesis, the publishers of this history began their preaching near to the time and at the place where he was said to have lived and to have performed all the mighty works which are recorded in the gospels. Let us imagine, then, an impostor announcing these as facts at Jerusalem; as facts which had lately occurred, and which were witnessed by thousands—would not every man, woman, and child have exclaimed: "This whole story is false—these things could not have happened without our hearing or knowing something of them. What an audacious falsehood! He pretends that for a long time this person, whom he calls Jesus Christ, resided among us, and preached his doctrines publicly, and wrought stupendous miracles; but we know all this to be false—a barefaced imposture, unsupported by the shadow of evidence."

And if we assume the ground, that the attempt was made at any other period, or in any other place, the absurd consequences flowing from this hypothesis will be equally manifest. Deists, therefore, have not commonly been fond of taking this ground, although it is far the most consistent deistical hypothesis; for if you admit that part of the history which contains events not miraculous, you can hardly avoid receiving these also, so closely are they interwoven together, and dependent on each other. Volney, L'Aquinio, and a few others, in the time of the French revolution, boldly advocated this theory, and denied that any such persons as Jesus Christ or his apostles ever lived in the world. Now as I said, this scheme is the most consistent for the rejecters of Christianity; but is it rational? is it credible? I could persuade myself of the reality of a thousand well-attested miracles, before I could believe that the whole world has been deceived in such a matter. Indeed, it would at one stroke destroy all the credibility of history; for if Jesus Christ never existed, from whom such a series of events have flowed down to our own times, how can we be satisfied that any man whose exploits are recorded in history ever lived? According to this, Volney might have saved himself the trouble of accounting for the ruin of ancient cities and empires; for perhaps, they never existed. True, he saw the splendid ruins of Palmyra; but these exquisitely wrought pillars might possibly have been a mere freak of nature, in one of her

wild moods. Rational belief always lies in the midst between two absurdities. While the deist shuns what he calls the weak credulity of believing in miracles, he falls into the monstrous absurdity of denying all testimony. And in this case he can be confronted, not only with the testimony of Christians, but with that of Heathen and Jewish writers. TACITUS, SUETONIUS, and PLINY, all bear ample testimony against this visionary theory. The first of these lived during the first century of the Christian era. His character as an historian stands too high to need any eulogium or description. After giving an account of the terrible fire by which a large part of the city of Rome was consumed, and of the exertions made to rebuild and beautify the city, he adds, "But neither by human aid, nor by the costly largesses by which he attempted to propitiate the gods, was the prince able to remove from himself the infamy which had attached to him in the opinion of all, for having ordered the conflagration. To suppress this rumor, therefore, Nero caused others to be accused, on whom he inflicted exquisite torments, who were already hated by the people for their crimes, and were vulgarly denominated CHRISTIANS. This name they derived from CHRIST their leader, who in the reign of TIBERIUS was put to death as a criminal, while PONTIUS PILATE was procurator. This destructive superstition, repressed for a while, again broke out, and spread not only through Judea where it originated, but reached this city also, into which flow all things that are vile and abominable, and where they are encouraged. At first, they only were seized who confessed that they belonged to this sect; and afterwards a vast multitude, by the information of these, who were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for hatred of the human race. These, clothed in the skins of wild beasts, were exposed to derision, and were either torn to pieces by dogs, or were affixed to crosses; or when the day-light was past, were set on fire, that they might serve instead of lamps for the night."

SUETONIUS lived also at the close of the first and beginning of the second century. In his life of Claudius the emperor, he has these words, "He banished the Jews from Rome who were continually raising disturbances, Christ (Chrestus) being their leader." And in the life of Nero, he says, "The Christians were punished, a sort of men of a new and magical religion."

But there is nothing among the testimonies of Heathen writers of this period so full and satisfactory, with regard to the existence

and wide spread of Christianity, as the Letter of **PLINY the YOUNGER**, a translation of which, therefore, I will here insert, although it has been often published.

“Pliny to the emperor Trajan wisheth health, &c. It is my custom, Sir, to refer all things to you of which I entertain any doubt; for who can better direct me in my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I was never before present at any of the trials of Christians; so that I am ignorant both of the matter to be inquired into, and of the nature of the punishment which should be inflicted, and to what length the investigation is to be extended. I have, moreover, been in great uncertainty, whether any difference ought to be made on account of age, between the young and tender, and the robust; and also whether any place should be allowed for repentance and pardon; or whether those who have once been Christians should be punished, although they have now ceased to be such, and whether punishment should be inflicted merely on account of the name where no crimes are charged, or whether crimes connected with the name are the proper object of punishment. This, however, is the method which I have pursued in regard to those who were brought before me as Christians. I interrogated them whether they were Christians; and upon their confessing that they were, I put the question to them a second and a third time; threatening them with capital punishment; and when they persisted in their confession, I ordered them to be led away to execution: for whatever might be the nature of their crime, I could not doubt that perverseness and inflexible obstinacy deserve to be punished. There were others addicted to the same insanity, whom, because they were Roman citizens, I have noted down to be sent to the city. In a short space, the crime diffusing itself, as is common, a great variety of cases have fallen under my cognizance. An anonymous libel was exhibited to me, containing the names of many persons who denied that they were Christians or ever had been; and as an evidence of their sincerity, they joined me in an address to the gods, and to your image, which I had ordered to be brought along with the images of the gods for this very purpose.—Moreover, they sacrificed with wine and frankincense, and blasphemed the name of Christ; none of which things can those who are really Christians be constrained to do. Therefore I judged it proper to dismiss them. Others named by the informer, at first confessed themselves to be Christians and afterwards denied it; and some asserted, that although they had

been Christians, they had ceased to be such, for more than three years, and some as much as twenty years. All these worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and execrated Christ. But they affirmed, that this was the sum of their fault or error, that they were accustomed, on a stated day, to meet together before day, to sing a hymn to Christ in concert, as to a God, and to bind themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wickedness—but on the contrary to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery—also, never to violate their promise, nor deny a pledge committed to them. These things being performed, it was their custom to separate; and to meet again at a promiscuous, innocent meal; which, however, they had omitted, from the time of the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I forbade assemblies of this sort. On receiving this account, I judged it to be the more necessary to examine by torture, two females, who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing except a depraved and immoderate superstition. Whereupon, suspending further judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice; for it has appeared to me, that the subject is highly deserving of consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons whose lives are put into jeopardy. Many persons of all ages, sexes, and conditions are accused, and many more will be in the same situation; for the contagion of this superstition has not merely pervaded the cities, but also all villages and country places; yet it seems to me that it might be restrained and corrected. It is a matter of fact, that the temples which were almost deserted begin again to be frequented; and the sacred solemnities which had been long intermitted are again attended; and victims for the altars are now readily sold, which, a while ago, were almost without purchasers. Whence it is easy to conjecture what a multitude of men might be reclaimed, if only the door to repentance was left open.”

The answer of the emperor Trajan to this remarkable letter of Pliny is also still extant; and there has never been a doubt raised respecting the genuineness of either of them.

“Trajan to Pliny—Health and happiness.

“You have taken the right method, my Pliny, in dealing with those who have been brought before you as Christians; for it is impossible to establish any universal rule which will apply to all cases. They should not be sought after: but when they are brought before you and convicted, they must be punished. Nevertheless, if any one

deny that he is a Christian, and confirm his assertion by his conduct; that is, by worshipping our gods, although he may be suspected of having been one in time past; let him obtain pardon on repentance. But in no case permit a libel against any one to be received, unless it be signed by the person who presents it, for that would be a dangerous precedent, and in nowise suitable to the present age."

From these epistles, written at the very commencement of the second century, we learn how rapidly and extensively Christianity, notwithstanding all opposition, had spread over the Roman empire. Long before Pliny wrote, the temples and sacrifices had been almost forsaken; and even now the multitude implicated in the charge of being Christians was so great, that he suspended all judicial proceedings against them, until he should consult the emperor as to what was proper to be done.

It must by this time be sufficiently evident, that they undertake the defence of a desperate cause, who maintain the hypothesis, that such a person as Christ never existed, but that he is merely a fictitious being.

Let us then in the next place inquire, what will be the consequences of supposing that Jesus Christ did live and teach in Judea about eighteen centuries ago, and that he was apprehended by the Jewish rulers and priests, and at their instigation was crucified under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, in the reign of the emperor Tiberius; but that all that is recorded in the gospels respecting his divine mission, his miraculous birth, his wonderful works, and his resurrection from the dead, was invented by certain fraudulent disciples after the death of their Master. This I suppose is the commonly received theory of deists, and if it cannot stand the test of a thorough scrutiny, their cause is manifestly untenable, and should be abandoned. Here again, there may be a choice in the selection of the period when these miracles began to be published, and these gospels to be received. If this is said to have occurred immediately after the death of Christ, the same difficulties press on the scheme, which were shown to follow upon the former hypothesis: that is, if such an imposture had been attempted, the falsehood of the history would have been evident to all the world. To one making such declarations at Jerusalem, any one of the people might have replied, "The person concerning whom you testify was known to us. He spent much of his time in this city, and was

a teacher and public preacher, and was seized at the feast of the passover by our rulers, and delivered over to Pilate as a seditious and dangerous person; but as to what you say about his raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, health to the sick, and performing other wonderful works, there is not a word of truth in it, and such things were never heard of before—and, moreover, these books which you wish to palm upon us are utterly unworthy of credit, and are replete with falsehoods, known to be such by all the people of this land.” How could any impostor have been successful in gaining credence to his imposture in such circumstances?

But the deist will select a later period for the commencement of the fraud. Suppose we say, a hundred years after Christ was crucified; we cannot bring it lower down without encumbering the hypothesis with greater difficulties and absurdities than by choosing this time, on account of the testimonies of numerous Christian writers in corroboration of the gospel-history. A hundred years, then, after the death of Christ, some persons undertake to give out and publish in writing that he performed those mighty works, which none before had heard a whisper of. This imposture could not then have been by the instrumentality of the immediate followers of Christ, for these must have been dead. The question therefore naturally arises, did the Christian Church exist before this time, and on what principles was it founded? If it did not exist before, then the book now published would carry its falsehood on its face, as it describes all the particulars of the first planting of the church at Jerusalem, and its rapid extension over the world. If the church did exist—a fact capable of the clearest proof—men must have become the disciples of Christ without any persuasion that he was a divine messenger, or possessed any extraordinary commission: yea, the first Christians must have forsaken the religious customs of their forefathers, and exposed themselves to every species of persecution for the sake of a man who was crucified as a malefactor, and without any belief that he had risen again and was now alive. This indeed gives us a new view of the origin of Christianity, and a new view of human nature also; but is it a reasonable hypothesis? Can any man believe it? How, upon these principles, can we account for the extraordinary progress of Christianity? About this time, it has been shown from the most respectable heathen historians, this religion had extended over Asia Minor, and had reached Rome: but by what means was this effected, when, ac-

cording to the hypothesis, there was not a pretence of any thing miraculous? And how did these cunning impostors who now arose, contrive to persuade the Christian church that their religion was founded on these miraculous facts, which they had never heard of before? And how did they bring it about that at once these forged books should be received by every portion of the church as the writings of the apostles and immediate followers of Christ? How wonderful, that a society existing in many different countries should be persuaded henceforth to adopt an entirely new creed, and to appeal to books as containing the true origin of their religion, which were just now written by impostors, and replete with extravagant falsehoods! The whole thing is incredible, and indeed impossible. Such an imposture could not have been successful. It is not more certain that Christianity now exists, than that the belief of miracles was coeval with its origin. A Christian without belief of the divine mission and resurrection of Christ, is a monstrous absurdity. And why did not the early enemies of Christianity, such as Celsus, Porphyry and Julian, lay open the imposture? Why did they not utterly deny the facts recorded in the gospel? This they dared not do. Instead of this, they set themselves to account for these wonderful works by magic; as did also the Jewish doctors whose opinions are in the Talmud. This fact shows most conclusively that in the early ages the current of universal tradition, as well as written records, was so strong in favor of the miracles of Christ, that they could not be successfully denied. This led the opposers of the gospel to pretend that other men had performed as great miracles as Jesus. And, perhaps, the deist could not now adopt a wiser course than to admit the miraculous facts, and reason against them on the same principles as the old impugnors of the Christian religion.

From every view which we can take of this subject, it is evident, that whether the gospel be true or not, it is supported by all the testimony and by all the collateral evidence which it could have, if it were true. That is, we must believe this history, or relinquish the principles of reason which guide us in other cases.

The historical evidence is the first great obstacle in the way of adopting the deistical hypothesis; the second is, that the purity, consistency, and moral excellence of these writings cannot be reconciled with the idea that they are the works of vile impostors. It is an old and trite argument, that such a book as the New Testa-



ment could not be the production of bad men, because it is stamped with so much holiness, and is replete with such excellent views of duty and pure morality, that men of depraved minds could have possessed neither the ability nor the will to be the authors of it. What wicked man would have ever thought of inventing such discourses as those of Christ? Or how can it be conceived, that an impostor, in whom there must be a combination of the most degrading vices, could have given such pure and perfect lessons of morality, as those contained in the Epistles of the Apostles?

If, therefore, all historical documents were buried in oblivion, there is that internal light beaming from every page of this sacred volume, which will ever recommend it to the approbation of the good. And this leads me to a remark, which may seem to be rather invidious, but which is supported by an overpowering weight of evidence, that the true cause of deism is to be sought, not in the weakness of the evidence of divine revelation, nor in the recondite nature of the arguments by which it is supported; but in the unhappy state of mind with which the subject is approached. A heart glowing with love to God and man; in which all must acknowledge moral excellence in man consists; would so prepare the mind to appreciate the evidences of Christianity, both external and internal: that I am persuaded nothing more would be necessary to produce a strong faith in the Scriptures of the New Testament; as not only containing a true and faithful history, but as being given by divine inspiration, and therefore, an infallible rule to guide us in all matters of truth and duty.

But it is now time that I should give some account of the treatises included in the following volume. In the selection of these the writer has had no concern, but he approves of the plan of the editor, and is of opinion that by comprising so many works of standard excellence in one convenient duodecimo, he will be rendering a real service to the cause of revealed religion, and will furnish a desired accommodation to students of theology; and to others who are obliged to regard economy in the purchase of books.

The grand problem which deists have hitherto failed to solve, is, to account for the existence and rapid progress of Christianity. No man was better fitted to remove this difficulty, had it been possible, than *Edward Gibbon, Esq.*, who had access to all the sources

of information which could be applied to the elucidation of this point. And Christianity is so thoroughly incorporated with the latter part of the history of the Roman empire, that the historian of this period is laid under a necessity of giving some opinion respecting the origin and progress of a system which soon gave complexion to all the transactions of the civilized world. Although *Gibbon* hated the Christian religion, and would willingly have lent his aid to banish it from the earth; yet he was too well aware of the difficulty of the subject, to venture a direct and open attack on this citadel of truth, which had already repelled with triumph so many assaults. His attempt, therefore, was to account for this extraordinary fact by referring it to natural causes. This, indeed, was a very indirect method of attaining his end; for even if the reasons assigned had been sufficient to account for the acknowledged fact, yet these might not have been the real causes. It is a sound rule of reasoning, that the causes which we assign to account for effects must not only be adequate, but true. If the conversion of the world to Christianity could possibly be accounted for without supposing the interposition of a supernatural power; it might nevertheless have been the effect of miraculous power. But if he had succeeded in his attempt, the arguments for a divine origin of our holy religion would have been greatly diminished; for it is a good rule, that what can be accounted for by natural causes, ought not to be attributed to supernatural powers. It is however, a strong presumptive proof in favor of the historical evidence of the gospels, that such a man, with the stores of ancient knowledge open before him, did not venture to attack it; either by showing that the testimony was inadequate, or by adducing other evidence to invalidate that which has been given in support of Christianity. His forbearance, it is certain, was not owing to a want of will, but to a want of power; and what *GIBBON* perceived to be impracticable, in vain may any other infidel undertake to perform. It cannot be said, that the historian went out of his way to meet this question: he could not avoid it. It lay so directly in his path, that he was obliged to acknowledge the divine origin of Christianity, or to account for its success in some other way. The latter course he chose to pursue; and we have the result of his inquiries, or more properly his conjectures, in the XV. and XVI. Chapters of his *DECLINE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE*. In examining this hypothesis the intelligent and

impartial reader cannot but be struck with the uncertainty and also the inadequacy of the causes assigned for this extraordinary moral revolution, by which the whole aspect and condition of the civilized world has been entirely changed. It is a matter of some surprise, that a mind so perspicacious, and so richly furnished, should have been so far satisfied with the reasons assigned as to stake his reputation as a man of sense and candor upon them, so as to consent to give them to the world, as an integral part of his splendid work. It is, however, no matter of wonder that he did not produce more satisfactory reasons for this grand phenomenon. The truth is, the more closely the circumstances of the case are investigated, the more manifest it will become, that nothing better can be said. Infidelity has here done her best, and if she has failed to achieve a victory, the blame should not be laid on her favorite champion, but on the cause, which did not admit of a more plausible defence. No sooner was the *History of the DECLINE AND FALL*, published, than a host of assailants entered the field, among whom, however, Doctor WATSON, then Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and afterwards bishop of Llandaff, stood pre-eminent. And while *Gibbon* treated his other antagonists rather cavalierly, he spoke of *Watson* with great respect. His work against *Gibbon* was published in the form of Letters to the historian, and entitled AN APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY. This first Apology of our author has been so long out of print, or at least so little circulated in this country, that even young men of learning, who have been attentive to the progress of this controversy, are scarcely aware that such a book exists. It was judicious, therefore, to give it a conspicuous place in this selection. All the friends of Christianity who are familiar with Dr. Watson's later work, in vindication of the Bible, will be gratified to see any thing else on this subject from his able pen. To this APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY is appended AN ADDRESS TO SCOFFERS, which has been pronounced by good judges not to be surpassed in eloquence and force, by any composition in the English language. To rescue this excellent address from oblivion, is itself an object of no small importance. And it is a composition as much adapted to our own times, as to the period when it was first published.

Watson's SECOND APOLOGY, entitled AN APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE, is a work much better known in this country than the former. This was written in answer to the second part of PAINE'S AGE OF

**REASON.** Paine had, by his political Essays, which were well suited to the spirit of the times, acquired a high reputation in this country as a clear and forcible writer. There had never appeared a work in favor of infidelity so well adapted to diffuse the poison through the mass of society. His style was perspicuous, pointed, and energetic; and was spiced with that species of profane ridicule, which is always found to be remarkably congenial with depraved minds. Moreover, his apparent exemption from all conscientious scruples, with an imposing confidence in the truth of his own opinions, recommended his work to multitudes, whose constant effort had been to free themselves from the shackles of conscience, the power of which was chiefly owing to the remains of a religious belief. Such men exulted in finding their own half-formed opinions and wishes boldly brought out, and the truths which they hated, because they were annoyed by them, turned into ridicule. It is impossible to calculate how much evil was produced by the profane writings of this impure and intemperate man. Seldom has a defender of the faith stepped forth more opportunely than did bishop Watson, on this occasion. Former infidels had for the most part fought in disguise; they did not openly declare themselves to be the enemies of the Bible. Their reasonings were often abstruse and metaphysical; or so obscure, and remote from common apprehension, that their books were read only by a few of the learned. But here was a most open, undisguised, and audacious attack on Christianity; and it was circulated with an industry not often exceeded. To counteract this popular and dangerous work, bishop Watson composed his answer in a perspicuous, pleasing, and popular style. His extensive learning and intimate acquaintance with the subject enabled him, with manifest ease, to detect the mistakes and expose the sophistry of Paine, who was really an ignorant man, and so little acquainted with the subject on which he undertook to write, that when he published his first part of the *Age of Reason*, he seems never to have read the Bible; and acknowledges that he had no copy at hand. He afterwards procured a Bible, and in some way, went over it, gleaning up such stale objections and arguments, as had been answered a hundred times; but which he brought forward with all the boasting of a man who had just made a wonderful discovery. Watson, throughout the work, maintains his dignity and treats his antagonist with courtesy; which, taking into view Paine's profane raillery, was no

easy task. In only one instance does he seem to yield to a feeling of indignation ; and every reasonable man will acquit him of undue severity, when he considers the provocation given by this impure infidel. And on that occasion he does no more than apply to him the words of Paul to Elymas the sorcerer, " O full of all subtilty and mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord ?"

It is impossible to calculate how much the Christian community is indebted to bishop Watson, for this able, popular, and seasonable vindication of the Bible, against the most virulent and audacious assault ever made upon it. The work was extensively circulated, and very generally read ; and in most cases served as an effectual antidote to the poison of the Age of Reason. Other solid answers to Paine were published ; and with a limited circulation were useful ; but none of them held any competition with the APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE ; which quickly passed through numerous editions, both in Great Britain and in this country ; and produced a salutary effect far beyond any other work of a similar kind, which has been published within the recollection of the writer. Since, however, the heat of the controversy has subsided, this valuable work is less frequently met with ; it is therefore of importance that it should have a place in a manual, where it may be perused again and again, by the rising generation. And this is the more necessary, since a new edition of "The Age of Reason" has recently been published in one of our large cities ; and as it is evident that the rancorous spirit of infidelity will, as heretofore, gather up the blunted but envenomed shafts which have so often been repelled by the shield of truth, and will continue to renew its desperate assaults against the citadel of divine revelation, until the time shall come when the grand adversary and patron of infidelity shall be driven from the earth and confined to the bottomless pit.

Some persons have expressed surprise and a degree of dissatisfaction at the title, APOLOGY, which bishop Watson has chosen to give to both his vindications of divine revelation. It seemed to them that this word conveyed the idea of something defective, or erroneous ; and they have been ready to say, that neither Christianity nor the Bible needed any apology. Now, it is true, that our English word is so understood by most who hear it ; but according to its etymology and ancient use, its import is "a defence." An

**APOLOGY** is the rendering a reason for any thing. And thus it was the usual name given by the early fathers to their defences of Christianity, and to these bishop Watson doubtless alludes in the title which he has selected.

There are few books concerning which it is more difficult to speak, without being misunderstood, than **SOAME JENYNS'S INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**, which occupies the third place in this collection. That the author exhibits those arguments here, which had produced a full persuasion of the truth of the New Testament in his own mind, there is little reason to doubt: and that the perusal of this little work has wrought a similar conviction in the minds of many other intelligent persons, is a fact of which there is not wanting abundant proof. And, indeed, judging from the impression which this luminous argument makes on my own mind, I can scarcely conceive how any ingenuous man can resist its force. It is said, I know not upon what authority, that Jenyns began to read the New Testament, with the view of writing against it, but arose from the perusal a confirmed believer; and then gave his own recently received views and convictions, in this little work. A tradition of the same kind has been handed down respecting several other learned men; particularly the fine classical scholar Mr. West.

**SOAME JENYNS** was, no doubt, an eccentric genius, and entertained many extravagant opinions, which badly cohere with a system of Christian doctrines. And even in this little work on the **EVIDENCES**, which I can cordially recommend in the main, I would by no means make myself responsible for every opinion which the author has expressed. There is strong evidence, however, to induce us to believe, that this ingenious writer actually experienced the salutary efficacy of those truths which he so ably defended. His **LECTURES** on religious subjects, which were from time to time delivered to a company of select friends, breathe so much of the spirit of genuine piety, that it is hard to believe the writer was not a sincere Christian.

In further attestation of the value of this work on **THE INTERNAL EVIDENCES**, it may be remarked, that Paley refers to it as containing every thing which is necessary on this branch of the subject; and accordingly he omits making any observations on this topic.

The writer would also mention, that he has often heard it as-

serted, and never contradicted, that the late PATRICK HENRY, the celebrated orator of Virginia and of the American revolution, had been in early life skeptical, but was fully satisfied of the truth of the Christian religion, by the perusal of this little treatise of SOAME JENYNS. And it is a well-known fact, that the work was re-printed in a pamphlet form, while he was governor of Virginia, and was widely circulated through the State; and, as was said and believed, under his auspices. It is, at any rate, undoubtedly true that from this period of his life he was the zealous and open advocate of divine revelation, until his dying day. This fact is not left to be handed down merely by tradition; as he took care to leave a full and explicit testimony in favor of Christianity, inserted in his last will and testament, which is on record.

The subject of the INTERNAL EVIDENCES has been ably treated by other authors. Fuller, Sumner, and Erskine have all written well on this topic; but by none of these productions has this little work of Jenyns been at all superseded.

LESLIE'S EASY METHOD WITH THE DEISTS, occupies the fourth place in this collection; but though least, it is not the weakest in argument. This little work may be considered the standing reproach of deists, ever since it was first published. It lays down certain *criteria* of the truth of historical facts, which it is asserted are applicable to no other than real events. It is shown that all these marks of truth are found to exist in the Mosaic and Evangelical narratives; and a challenge is given to the infidel to adduce any statement of facts, known to be false, to which they do apply. Now this is fairly bringing the subject to issue; and if the deist is unable to show that these circumstances meet in other cases, where it is acknowledged that the story is false or uncertain, then certainly, the verdict in the mind of every impartial man should be in favor of the truth of the Bible history. No answer to this work, as far as I know, has ever been attempted; and after it has been so long before the public, it may be fairly concluded that no satisfactory answer can be given. Here then we have a demonstration of the truth of divine revelation, comprised within a few pages; and although it has been often re-published, yet it cannot be too frequently presented to the view of the public, and especially of the rising generation.

The last treatise in this volume is one concerning which it is wholly unnecessary for me to speak, by way of commendation.

PALEY'S EVIDENCES is a work, which by its merit has become a text-book in the higher seminaries of learning, both in Great Britain, and in this country; and as long as our educated young men are required carefully to study this manual, there will be small danger of their being led away by the plausible but flimsy objections of deists. It is of immense importance to pre-occupy the young mind with just views of the evidences of divine revelation, before they are exposed to the pestiferous assaults of infidelity. Young men whose prepossessions are in favor of the Bible, but who want proper instruction on this subject, when they come to encounter the sophistical arguments of skeptics, either experience a subversion of their faith, or are thrown into distressing perplexity. No course of education is complete, or even safe, which does not include a thorough examination of the Evidences of the authenticity and inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. There is danger, at present, of imbibing a sickly liberality in regard to religion, the tendency of which is to place truth and error on an equal footing. It is true, in a country where so many conflicting sects exist, it is not expedient that the creed of any one Christian denomination should be inculcated in our public seminaries, to the exclusion of all others; yet certainly the fundamental principles of natural and revealed religion, in which all true Christians agree, ought not to be proscribed. There is a point beyond which concession cannot go, without an abandonment of the cause of truth, and with it, of all sound morality; for what else but truth can form the basis of pure morality? However loud may be the clamor against *sectarianism*, let us not be moved by it to abandon the fortress of truth: and if the Bible is rejected, or viewed as a book of dubious authority, there remains no other solid ground on which the friends of religion and morality can make a stand.

Few men have ever lived who were as well qualified to estimate the value of historic evidence, and to form an impartial judgment of the force of human testimony, as Doctor Paley. His perspicacity of intellect, his sobriety of judgment, his unbiassed love of truth, and his patient investigation of all circumstances, fitted him peculiarly for the defence of the great principles of natural and revealed theology. If any fraud or imposture had existed in regard to the Christian religion, by which the minds of others had been blinded, it would be difficult, from the whole catalogue of the learned, to select a man better suited to detect and dispel the



illusion. He is less profound than Butler, but his views and reasonings are much more on a level with the understanding of the bulk of mankind. The former collects and converges to a focus the feeble and scattered rays of light which pass unnoticed by others; the latter, neglecting weak arguments, seizes on the strong points of evidence in every subject, and exhibits them in a light so clear and steady, that he carries along with him the convictions of every mind, not closed against the force of truth, by strong and inveterate prejudice. Thus in his EVIDENCES he fixes on a single fact, the truth of which cannot be denied; namely, that in the commencement of the Christian religion many persons did voluntarily undergo the severest sufferings and persecutions in confirmation of their faith in this system. This fact, as we have seen, is fully attested by the highest Heathen as well as Christian authorities, and is now questioned by none. On this single point PALEY erects his battery, and his conclusion cannot be evaded without a renunciation of common sense, or of the commonly-received laws of evidence. It detracts something from the interest, and in my opinion, from the effect of this treatise, that the author considered it necessary to descend to so many minute details, in establishing the authenticity of the sacred books of the New Testament. For full satisfaction to the person who wishes to go into a thorough investigation, the testimonies here adduced are too jejune: it would be better to refer such an inquirer to JONES and LARDNER at once; and for common readers, these details only serve to interrupt the argument. To others, however, this work of Paley seems, in all respects, to approximate perfection. The pious and philanthropic Douglas, of Scotland, in a late work, expresses it as his opinion, that EUCLID'S ELEMENTS, and PALEY'S EVIDENCES, are the only two treatises which are perfectly adapted to the business of elementary instruction. This praise seems to me somewhat extravagant; for in my humble opinion, PALEY'S NATURAL THEOLOGY is superior to his EVIDENCES, as an elementary treatise; but this opinion from a mind so comprehensive and so highly gifted as that of the gentleman above mentioned, cannot but recommend this work to the careful perusal of all such persons as wish for full information and complete satisfaction on this momentous subject. And in regard to the propriety of giving it a place in such a selection as this, there can be but one opinion. Indeed, whatever else had been included in the volume, if this had

been omitted, it would have been considered defective, by most judicious readers.

It would have been easy to swell this volume to double its present size, without a repetition of the same arguments; but the Editor has rightly judged, that for ready circulation and convenient use, as well as on the score of economy, a book of moderate size will be best adapted to the greater number of readers. It is not recollected that any work precisely on the plan of the present publication, has been prepared. The writer has, indeed, seen, many years past, a little volume, entitled "THE PANOPLY," which contained a part of what is included in this selection; but it was never widely circulated, and has been long out of print.

The writer has only to add his sincere wishes for the success of this enterprise; so that there may be encouragement for other similar publications. He is deeply persuaded, that the real welfare of this growing nation can in no way be more effectually promoted, than by inculcating sound principles of religion and morality among the people at large; and that the greatest dangers which menace our beloved country, are to be apprehended from the progress of infidelity and vice. And let the adage that "a grain of prevention is better than an ounce of cure," be remembered, for it is as applicable to this subject as to any other. Every man, therefore, who contributes any thing to the circulation of good books on the evidences of religion, is actually conferring a benefit on his country, and while he promotes the cause of Christianity, at the same time performs the duty of a good patriot. In other countries religion is supported by the arm of civil authority, and attacks on revealed religion are punished as crimes against the state; but here, Christianity must depend upon her own resources; and when assailed, can resort to no other weapons but evidence and argument. And this state of things is not to be regretted; for the truth is mighty, and will eventually prevail. But let all the friends of truth perform the duty which is incumbent on them in such circumstances. And especially, let the Press be put continually into requisition for this purpose. The influence of the Press is incalculable, both for good and evil. And while, so much that is corrupting to the community flows through this channel, let the friends of truth, with fidelity and energy, apply the proper remedy.



AN  
**APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY,**  
IN  
A SERIES OF LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

**EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.**

AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE  
ROMAN EMPIRE.

BY

**R. WATSON, D. D., F. R. S.**

AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE.



THE  
AUTHOR'S ADVERTISEMENT.

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I KNOW not whether I may be allowed, without the imputation of vanity, to express the satisfaction I felt on being told by my bookseller, that another edition of the APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY was wanted. It is a satisfaction, however, in which vanity has no part; it is altogether founded in the delightful hope, that I may have been, in a small degree, instrumental in recommending the religion of Christ to the attention of some, who might not otherwise have considered it with that serious and unprejudiced disposition which its importance requires.

The celebrity of the work which gave rise to this apology, has, no doubt, principally contributed to its circulation: could I have entertained a thought, that it would have been called for so many years after its first publication, I would have endeavored to have rendered it more intrinsically worthy the public regard. It becomes not me, however, to depreciate what the world has approved; rather let me express an earnest wish, that those, who dislike not this little book, will peruse larger ones on the same subject: in them they will see the defects of this so abundantly supplied, as will, I trust, convince them, that the Christian religion is not a system of superstition, invented by enthusiasts, and patronized by statesmen for secular ends, but a revelation of the will of God.

LONDON, }  
*March 10, 1791.* }



# APOLOGY FOR CHRISTIANITY.

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## LETTER I.

SIR;—It would give me much uneasiness to be reputed an enemy to free inquiry in religious matters, or as capable of being animated into any degree of personal malevolence against those who differ from me in opinion. On the contrary, I look upon the right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as superior to the control of human authority; and have ever regarded free disquisition as the best mean of illustrating the doctrine, and establishing the truth of Christianity. Let the followers of Mahomet, and the zealots of the church of Rome, support their several religious systems by damping every effort of the human intellect to pry into the foundations of their faith: but never can it become a Christian, to be afraid of being asked “a reason of the faith that is in him;” nor a Protestant, to be studious of enveloping his religion in mystery and ignorance; nor the Church of England, to abandon that moderation by which she permits every individual *et sentire quæ velit, et quæ sentiat dicere*.

It is not, Sir, without some reluctance, that, under the influence of these opinions, I have prevailed upon myself to address these Letters to you; and you will attribute to the same motive my not having given you this trouble sooner. I had, moreover, an expectation, that the task would have been undertaken by some person capable of doing greater justice to the subject, and more worthy of your attention. Perceiving, however, that the two last chapters, the fifteenth in particular, of your very laborious and classical history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, had made upon many an impression not at all advantageous to Christianity; and that the silence of others, of the clergy especially, began to be looked upon as an acquiescence in what you had therein advanced; I have thought it my duty, with the utmost respect and good-will towards you, to take the liberty of suggesting to your consideration a few remarks upon some of the passages, which have been esteemed (whether you meant that they should be so esteemed or not) as powerfully militating against that revelation, which still is to many, what it formerly was “to the Greeks—foolishness;” but which we deem to be true, to “be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

To the inquiry, by what means the Christian faith obtained so



remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth, you rightly answer, by the evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its author. But afterwards, in assigning to this astonishing event five secondary causes, derived from the passions of the human heart, and the general circumstances of mankind, you seem to some to have insinuated, that Christianity, like other impostures, might have made its way in the world, though its origin had been as human as the means by which you suppose it was spread. It is no wish or intention of mine to fasten the odium of this insinuation upon you: I shall simply endeavor to show, that the causes you produce are either inadequate to the attainment of the end proposed; or that their efficiency, great as you imagine it, was derived from other principles than those you have thought proper to mention.

Your first cause is, "the inflexible, and, if you may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from embracing the law of Moses."—Yes, Sir, we are agreed that the zeal of the Christians was inflexible; "neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come," could bend it into a separation "from the love of God which was in Christ Jesus their Lord:" it was an inflexible obstinacy, in not blaspheming the name of Christ, which everywhere exposed them to persecution; and which even your amiable and philosophic Pliny thought proper, for want of other crimes, to punish with death in the Christians of his province. We are agreed, too, that the zeal of the Christians was intolerant; for it denounced "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that did evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile:" it would not tolerate in Christian worship those who supplicated the image of Cæsar, who bowed down at the altars of Paganism, who mixed with the votaries of Venus, or wallowed in the filth of Bacchanalian festivals.

But though we are thus far agreed with respect to the inflexibility and intolerance of Christian zeal, yet, as to the principle from which it was derived, we are *toto cælo* divided in opinion. You deduce it from the Jewish religion; I would refer it to a more adequate and a more obvious source, a full persuasion of the truth of Christianity. What! think you that it was a zeal derived from the unsocial spirit of Judaism, which inspired Peter with courage to upbraid the whole people of the Jews, in the very capital of Judea, with having "delivered up Jesus, with having denied him in the presence of Pilate, with having desired a murderer to be granted them in his stead, with having killed the Prince of life?" Was it from this principle that the same apostle, in conjunction with John, when summoned, not before the dregs of the people (whose judgments they might have been supposed capable of misleading, and whose resentment they might have despised,) but before the rulers and the elders and the scribes, the dread tribunal of the Jewish nation, and commanded by them to teach no more in the name of

Jesus—boldly answered, “that they could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard? They had seen with their eyes, they had handled with their hands, the word of life;” and no human jurisdiction could deter them from being faithful witnesses of what they had seen and heard. Here, then, you may perceive the genuine and undoubted origin of that zeal, which you ascribe to what appears to me a very insufficient cause; and which the Jewish rulers were so far from considering as the ordinary effect of their religion, that they were exceedingly at a loss how to account for it:—“now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled.” The apostles, heedless of consequences, and regardless of every thing but truth, openly everywhere professed themselves witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; and with a confidence which could proceed from nothing but conviction, and which pricked the Jews to the heart, bade “the house of Israel know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

I mean not to produce these instances of apostolic zeal as direct proofs of the truth of Christianity; for every religion, nay, every absurd sect of every religion, has had its zealots, who have not scrupled to maintain their principles at the expense of their lives; and we ought no more to infer the truth of Christianity from the mere zeal of its propagators, than the truth of Mahometanism from that of a Turk. When a man suffers himself to be covered with infamy, pillaged of his property, and dragged at last to the block or the stake, rather than give up his opinion; the proper inference is, not that his opinion is true, but that he believes it to be true; and a question of serious discussion immediately presents itself—upon what foundation has he built his belief? This is often an intricate inquiry, including in it a vast compass of human learning. A Bramin or a Mandarin, who should observe a missionary attesting the truth of Christianity with his blood, would, notwithstanding, have a right to ask many questions, before it could be expected that he should give an assent to our faith. In the case, indeed, of the apostles, the inquiry would be much less perplexed; since it would briefly resolve itself into this—whether they were credible reporters of facts, which they themselves professed to have seen—and it would be an easy matter to show, that their zeal, in attesting what they were certainly competent to judge of, could not proceed from any alluring prospect of worldly interest or ambition, or from any other probable motive than a love of truth.

But the credibility of the apostles' testimony, or their competency to judge of the facts which they relate, is not now to be examined; the question before us simply relates to the principle by which their zeal was excited: and it is a matter of real astonishment to me, that any one conversant with the history of the first propagation of Christianity, acquainted with the opposition it everywhere met with from the people of the Jews, and aware of the repugnancy which must ever subsist between its tenets and those of Judaism,

should ever think of deriving the zeal of the primitive Christians from the Jewish religion.

Both Jew and Christian, indeed, believed in one God, and abominated idolatry: but this detestation of idolatry, had it been unaccompanied with the belief of the resurrection of Christ, would probably have been just as inefficacious in exciting the zeal of the Christian to undertake the conversion of the Gentile world, as it had for ages been in exciting that of the Jew. But supposing, what I think you have not proved, and what I am certain cannot be admitted without proof, that a zeal derived from the Jewish religion inspired the first Christians with fortitude to oppose themselves to the institutions of Paganism; what was it that encouraged them to attempt the conversion of their own countrymen? Amongst the Jews they met with no superstitious observance of idolatrous rites; and therefore amongst them could have no opportunity of "declaring and confirming their zealous opposition to Polytheism, or of fortifying, by frequent protestations, their attachment to the Christian faith." Here then, at least, the cause you have assigned for Christian zeal ceases to operate; and we must look out for some other principle than a zeal against idolatry, or we shall never be able satisfactorily to explain the ardor with which the apostles pressed the disciples of Moses to become the disciples of Christ.

Again: Does a determined opposition to, and an open abhorrence of every the minutest part of an established religion, appear to you to be the most likely method of conciliating to another faith those who profess it? The Christians, you contend, could neither mix with the heathens in their convivial entertainments, nor partake with them in the celebration of their solemn festivals: they could neither associate with them in their hymeneal nor funeral rites: they could not cultivate their arts, or be spectators of their shows: in short, in order to escape the rites of Polytheism, they were in your opinion obliged to renounce the commerce of mankind, and all the offices and amusements of life. Now, how such an extravagant and intemperate zeal as you here describe, can, humanly speaking, be considered as one of the chief causes of the quick propagation of Christianity, in opposition to all the established powers of paganism, is a circumstance I can by no means comprehend. The Jesuit missionaries, whose human prudence no one will question, were quite of a contrary way of thinking; and brought a deserved censure upon themselves, for not scrupling to propagate the faith of Christ by indulging to their pagan converts a frequent use of idolatrous ceremonies. Upon the whole it appears to me, that the Christians were in nowise indebted to the Jewish religion for the zeal with which they propagated the Gospel amongst Jews as well as Gentiles; and that such a zeal as you describe, let its principle be what you please, could never have been devised by any human understanding as a probable mean of promoting the progress of a reformation in religion, much less could it have been thought of or adopted by a few ignorant and unconnected men.

In expatiating upon this subject you have taken an opportunity of

remarking, that "the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles—and that, in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, that singular people (the Jews) seems to have yielded a stronger and more ready assent to the traditions of their remote ancestors, than to the evidence of their own senses." This observation bears hard upon the veracity of the Jewish Scriptures; and, was it true, would force us either to reject them, or to admit a position as extraordinary as a miracle itself—that the testimony of others produced in the human mind a stronger degree of conviction, concerning a matter of fact, than the testimony of the senses themselves. It happens, however, in the present case, that we are under no necessity of either rejecting the Jewish Scriptures, or of admitting such an absurd position; for the fact is not true, that the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua beheld with careless indifference the miracles related in the Bible to have been performed in their favor. That these miracles were not sufficient to awe the Israelites into a uniform obedience to the Theocracy, cannot be denied; but whatever reasons may be thought best adapted to account for the propensity of the Jews to idolatry, and their frequent defection from the worship of one true God, a "stubborn incredulity" cannot be admitted as one of them.

To men, indeed, whose understandings have been enlightened by the Christian revelation, and enlarged by all the aids of human learning; who are under no temptations to idolatry from without, and whose reason from within would revolt at the idea of worshipping the infinite Author of the universe under any created symbol; to men who are compelled, by the utmost exertion of their reason, to admit as an irrefragable truth, what puzzles the first principles of all reasoning, the eternal existence of an uncaused being; and who are conscious that they cannot give a full account of any one phenomenon in nature, from the rotation of the great orbs of the universe to the germination of a blade of grass, without having recourse to him as the primary incomprehensible cause of it; and who, from seeing him everywhere, have, by a strange fatality (converting an excess of evidence into a principle of disbelief), at times doubted concerning his existence anywhere, and made the very universe their God; to men of such a stamp, it appears almost an incredible thing, that any human being, which had seen the order of nature interrupted, or the uniformity of its course suspended, though but for a moment, should ever afterwards lose the impression of reverential awe which they apprehend would have been excited in their minds. But whatever effect the visible interposition of the Deity might have in removing the scepticism, or confirming the faith, of a few philosophers, it is with me a very great doubt, whether the people in general of our days would be more strongly affected by it than they appear to have been in the days of Moses.

Was any people under heaven to escape the certain destruction impending over them, from the close pursuit of an enraged and irresistible enemy, by seeing the waters of the ocean "becoming a

wall to them on their right hand and on their left;" they would, I apprehend, be agitated by the very same passions we are told the Israelites were, when they saw the sea returning to his strength, and swallowing up the host of Pharaoh; they "would fear the Lord, they would believe the Lord," and they would express their faith and their fear by praising the Lord: they would not behold such a great work with "careless indifference," but with astonishment and terror; nor would you be able to detect the slightest vestige of "stubborn incredulity" in their song of gratitude. No length of time would be able to blot from their minds the memory of such a transaction, or induce a doubt concerning its author; though future hunger and thirst might make them call out for water and bread, with a desponding and rebellious importunity.

But it was not at the Red Sea only that the Israelites regarded with something more than a "careless indifference" the amazing miracles which God had wrought; for, when the law was declared to them from mount Sinai, "all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the tempest, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off: and they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." This again, Sir, is the Scripture account of the language of the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua; and I leave it to you to consider whether this is the language of "stubborn incredulity, and careless indifference."

We are told, in Scripture, too, that whilst any of the "contemporaries" of Moses and Joshua were alive, the whole people served the Lord: the impression which a sight of the miracles had made was never effaced; nor the obedience, which might have been expected as a natural consequence, refused, till Moses and Joshua, and all their contemporaries, were gathered unto their fathers; till "another generation after them arose, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." But "the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel."

I am far from thinking you, Sir, unacquainted with Scripture, or desirous of sinking the weight of its testimony; but as the words of the history, from which you must have derived your observation, will not support you in imputing "careless indifference" to the contemporaries of Moses, or "stubborn incredulity" to the forefathers of the Jews, I know not what can have induced you to pass so severe a censure upon them; except that you look upon a lapse into idolatry as a proof of infidelity. In answer to this I would remark, that with equal soundness of argument we ought to infer, that every one, who transgresses a religion, disbelieves it; and that every individual, who in any community incurs civil pains and penalties, is a disbeliever of the existence of the authority by which they are inflicted. The sanctions of the Mosaic law were, in your opinion, terminated within the narrow limits of this life; in that particular, then, they must have resembled the sanctions of all other civil

laws: "transgress and die" is the language of every one of them, as well as that of Moses; and I know not what reason we have to expect, that the Jews, who were animated by the same hopes of temporal rewards, impelled by the same fears of temporal punishments, with the rest of mankind, should have been so singular in their conduct, as never to have listened to the clamors of passion before the still voice of reason; as never to have preferred a present gratification of sense, in the lewd celebration of idolatrous rites, before the rigid observance of irksome ceremonies.

Before I release you from the trouble of this Letter, I cannot help observing, that I could have wished you had furnished your reader with Limborch's answers to the objections of the Jew Orobio, concerning the perpetual obligation of the law of Moses. You have indeed mentioned Limborch with respect, in a short note; but though you have studiously put into the mouths of the Judaising Christians in the apostolic days, and with great strength inserted into your text, whatever has been said by Orobio or others against Christianity, from the supposed perpetuity of the Mosaic dispensation; yet you have not favored us with any one of the numerous replies which have been made to these seemingly strong objections. You are pleased, it is true, to say, "that the industry of our learned divines has abundantly explained the ambiguous language of the Old Testament, and the ambiguous conduct of the apostolic teachers." It requires, Sir, no learned industry to explain what is so obvious and so express, that he who runs may read it. The language of the Old Testament is this: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt." This, methinks, is a clear and solemn declaration; there is no ambiguity at all in it; that the covenant with Moses was not to be perpetual, but was in some future time to give way to a "new covenant." I will not detain you with an explanation of what Moses himself has said upon this subject; but you may try, if you please, whether you can apply the following declaration, which Moses made to the Jews, to any prophet or succession of prophets, with the same propriety that you can to Jesus Christ: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto thee: unto him shall ye hearken." If you think this ambiguous or obscure, I answer, that it is not a history, but a prophecy; and, as such, unavoidably liable to some degree of obscurity, till interpreted by the event.

Nor was the conduct of the apostles more ambiguous than the language of the Old Testament: they did not indeed at first comprehend the whole of the nature of the new dispensation; and when they did understand it better, they did not think proper upon every occasion to use their Christian liberty; but, with true Christian charity, accommodated themselves in matters of indifference to the prejudices of their weaker brethren. But he who changes his con-

duct with a change of sentiments, proceeding from an increase of knowledge, is not ambiguous in his conduct; nor should he be accused of a culpable duplicity, who, in a matter of the last importance, endeavors to conciliate the good-will of all, by conforming in a few innocent observances to the particular persuasions of different men.

One remark more, and I have done. In your account of the Gnostics, you have given us a very minute catalogue of the objections which they made to the authority of Moses, from his account of the creation, of the patriarchs, of the law, and of the attributes of the Deity. I have not leisure to examine whether the Gnostics of former ages really made all the objections you have mentioned; I take it for granted, upon your authority, that they did: but I am certain, if they did, that the Gnostics of modern times have no reason to be puffed up with their knowledge, or to be had in admiration as men of subtle penetration or refined erudition: they are all miserable copiers of their brethren of antiquity; and neither Morgan, nor Tindal, nor Bolingbroke, nor Voltaire, have been able to produce scarce a single new objection. You think that the Fathers have not properly answered the Gnostics. I make no question, Sir, you are able to answer them to your own satisfaction, and informed of every thing that has been said by our "industrious divines" upon the subject; and we should have been glad, if it had fallen in with your plan to have administered together with the poison its antidote: but, since that is not the case, lest its malignity should spread too far, I must just mention it to my younger readers, that Leland and others, in their replies to the modern deists, have given very full, and, as many learned men apprehend, very satisfactory answers to every one of the objections which you have derived from the Gnostic heresy. I am, &c.

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## LETTER II.

SIR;—"The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth," is the second of the causes to which you attribute the quick increase of Christianity. Now, if we impartially consider the circumstances of the persons to whom the doctrine, not simply of a future life, but of a future life accompanied with punishments as well as rewards; not only of the immortality of the soul, but of the immortality of the soul accompanied with that of the resurrection, was delivered; I cannot be of opinion, that, abstracted from the supernatural testimony by which it was enforced, it could have met with any very extensive reception amongst them.

It was not that kind of future life which they expected; it did not hold out to them the punishments of the infernal regions as *aniles*

*fabulas.* To the question, *Quid si post mortem maneat animi?* they could not answer with Cicero and the philosophers—*Beatos esse concedo*; because there was a great probability that it might be quite otherwise with them. I am not to learn, that there are passages to be picked up in the writings of the ancients, which might be produced as proofs of their expecting a future state of punishment for the flagitious; but this opinion was worn out of credit before the time of our Saviour: the whole disputation in the first book of the *Tusculan Questions* goes upon the other supposition. Nor was the absurdity of the doctrine of future punishments confined to the writings of the philosophers, or the circles of the learned and polite; for Cicero, to mention no others, makes no secret of it in his public pleadings before the people at large. You, yourself, Sir, have referred to his oration for Cluentius: in this oration, you may remember, he makes great mention of a very abandoned fellow, who had forged I know not how many wills, murdered I know not how many wives, and perpetrated a thousand other villanies; yet even to this profligate, by name Oppianicus, he is persuaded that death was not the occasion of any evil.\* Hence, I think, we may conclude, that such of the Romans as were not wholly infected with the annihilating notions of Epicurus, but entertained (whether from remote tradition or enlightened argumentation) hopes of a future life, had no manner of expectation of such a life as included in it the severity of punishment denounced in the Christian scheme against the wicked.

Nor was it that kind of future life which they wished: they would have been glad enough of an Elysium, which could have admitted into it men who had spent this life in the perpetration of every vice which can debase and pollute the human heart. To abandon every seducing gratification of sense, to pluck up every latent root of ambition, to subdue every impulse of revenge, to divest themselves of every inveterate habit in which their glory and their pleasure consisted; to do all this and more, before they could look up to the doctrine of a future life without terror and amazement, was not, one would think, an easy undertaking: nor was it likely, that many would forsake the religious institutions of their ancestors, set at naught the gods under whose auspices the capitol had been founded, and Rome made mistress of the world; and suffer themselves to be persuaded into the belief of a tenet, the very mention of which made Felix tremble, by any thing less than a full conviction of the supernatural authority of those who taught it.

The several schools of Gentile philosophy had discussed, with no small subtlety, every argument which reason could suggest, for and against the immortality of the soul; and those uncertain glimmerings of the light of nature would have prepared the minds of the

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\* Nam nunc quidem quid tandem mali illi mors attulit? nisi fortè ineptiis ac fabulis ducimur. ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre, ac plures illic offendisse inimicos quam hic reliquisse—quæ si falsa sint, id quod omnes intelligunt, &c.



learned for the reception of the full illustration of this subject by the Gospel, had not the resurrection been a part of the doctrine therein advanced. But that this corporeal frame, which is hourly mouldering away, and resolved at last into the undistinguished mass of elements from which it was at first derived, should ever be "clothed with immortality; that this corruptible should *ever* put on incorruption;" is a truth so far removed from the apprehension of philosophical research, so dissonant from the common conceptions of mankind, that amongst all ranks and persuasions of men it was esteemed an impossible thing. At Athens, the philosophers had listened with patience to St. Paul, whilst they conceived him but a "setter forth of strange gods;" but as soon as they comprehended, that by the *αναστασις* he meant the resurrection, they turned from him with contempt. It was principally the insisting upon the same topic, which made Festus think "that much learning had made him mad." And the questions, "How are the dead raised up?" and, "With what body do they come?" seem, by Paul's solicitude to answer them with fullness and precision, to have been not unfrequently proposed to him by those who were desirous of becoming Christians.

The doctrine of a future life, then, as promulged in the Gospel, being neither agreeable to the expectations, nor corresponding with the wishes, nor conformable to the reason of the Gentiles, I can discover no motive (setting aside the true one, the divine power of its first preachers,) which could induce them to receive it; and, in consequence of their belief, to conform their loose morals to the rigid standard of Gospel purity, upon the mere authority of a few contemptible fishermen of Judea. And even you, yourself, Sir, seem to have changed your opinion concerning the efficacy of the expectation of a future life in converting the heathens, when you observe, in the following chapter, that "the pagan multitude; reserving their gratitude for temporal benefits alone, rejected the inestimable present of life and immortality which was offered to mankind by Jesus of Nazareth."

Montesquieu is of opinion, that it will ever be impossible for Christianity to establish itself in China and the East, from the circumstance that it prohibits a plurality of wives. How then could it have been possible for it to have pervaded the voluptuous capital, and traversed the utmost limits of the empire of Rome, by the feeble efforts of human industry, or human knavery?

But the Gentiles, you are of opinion, were converted by their fears; and reckon the doctrine of Christ's speedy appearance, of the millennium, and of the general conflagration, amongst those additional circumstances which gave weight to that concerning a future state. Before I proceed to the examination of the efficiency of these several circumstances in alarming the apprehensions of the Gentiles, what if I should grant your position? Still the main question recurs. From what source did they derive the fears which converted them? Not surely from the mere human labors of men who were everywhere spoken against, made a spectacle of, and considered as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things;

not surely from the human powers of him, who professed himself "rude in speech, in bodily presence contemptible," and a despiser of "the excellency of speech, and the enticing words of men's wisdom." No, such wretched instruments were but ill fitted to inspire the haughty and the learned Romans with any other passions than those of pity or contempt.

Now, Sir, if you please, we will consider that universal expectation of the approaching end of the world, which, you think, had such great influence in converting the pagans to the profession of Christianity. The near approach, you say, of this wonderful event had been predicted by the apostles, "though the revolution of seventeen centuries has instructed us not to press too closely the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation." That this opinion, even in the times of the apostles, had made its way into the Christian church, I readily admit; but that the apostles ever either predicted this event to others, or cherished the expectation of it in themselves, does not seem probable to me. As this is a point of some difficulty and importance, you will suffer me to explain it at some length.

It must be owned, that there are several passages in the writings of the apostles, which, at the first view, seem to countenance the opinion you have adopted. "Now," says St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, "it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand." And in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians he comforts such of them as were sorrowing for the loss of their friends, by assuring them, that they were not lost for ever; but that the Lord, when he came, would bring them with him; and that they would not, in the participation of any blessings, be in anywise behind those who should happen then to be alive: "We," says he (the Christians of whatever age or country, agreeable to a frequent use of the pronoun *we*), "which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep; for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord." In his Epistle to the Philippians he exhorts his Christian brethren not to disquiet themselves with carking cares about their temporal concerns, from this powerful consideration, that the Lord was at hand: "Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is at hand: be careful about nothing." The apostle to the Hebrews inculcates the same doctrine, admonishing his converts "to provoke one another to love, and to good works; and so much the more, as they saw the day approaching." The age in which the apostles lived is frequently called by them the end of the world, the last days, the last hour. I think it unnecessary, Sir, to trouble you with an explication of these and other similar texts of Scripture, which are usually adduced in support of your opinion; since I hope to be able to give you a direct proof, that the apostles neither comforted themselves, nor encouraged others, with the delightful hope of seeing

their master coming again into the world. It is evident, then, that St. John, who survived all the other apostles, could not have had any such expectation; since, in the book of the Revelation, the future events of the Christian church, which were not to take place, many of them, till a long series of years after his death, and some of which have not yet been accomplished, are there minutely described. St. Peter, in like manner, strongly intimates, that the day of the Lord might be said to be at hand, though it was at the distance of a thousand years or more; for in replying to the taunt of those who did then, or should in future ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" he says, "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day: The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." And he speaks of putting off his tabernacle, as the Lord had showed him; and of his endeavor, that the Christians after his decease might be able to have these things in remembrance: so that it is past a doubt, he could not be of opinion, that the Lord would come in his time. As to St. Paul, upon a partial view of whose writings the doctrine concerning the speedy coming of Christ is principally founded, it is manifest, that he was conscious he should not live to see it, notwithstanding the expression before-mentioned, "we which are alive;" for he foretells his own death in express terms: "The time of my departure is at hand;" and he speaks of his reward, not as immediately to be conferred on him, but as laid up, and reserved for him till some future day. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." There is, moreover, one passage in his writings, which is so express, and full to the purpose, that it will put the matter, I think, beyond all doubt; it occurs in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: they, it seems, had, either by misinterpreting some parts of his former letter to them, or by the preaching of some, who had not the spirit of truth; by some means or other, they had been led to expect the speedy coming of Christ, and been greatly disturbed in mind upon that account. To remove this error, he writes to them in the following very solemn and affectionate manner: "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is at hand; let no man deceive you by any means." He then goes on to describe a falling away, a great corruption of the Christian church, which was to happen before the day of the Lord. Now, by this revelation of the man of sin, this mystery of iniquity, which is to be consumed with the spirit of his mouth, destroyed by the brightness of his coming, we have every reason to believe, is to be understood the past and present abominations of the church of Rome. How then can it be said of Paul, who clearly foresaw this corruption above seventeen hundred years ago, that he expected the coming of the Lord in his

own day? Let us press, Sir, the mysterious language of prophecy and revelation as closely as you please; but let us press it truly; and we may, perhaps, find reason from thence to receive, with less reluctance, a religion, which describes a corruption, the strangeness of which, had it not been foretold in unequivocal terms, might have amazed even a friend to Christianity.

I will produce you, Sir, a prophecy, which, the more closely you press it, the more reason you will have to believe, that the speedy coming of Christ could never have been "predicted" by the apostles. Take it, as translated by Bishop Newton: "But the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall apostatize from the faith; giving heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons, through the hypocrisy of liars; having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats." Here you have an express prophecy; the Spirit hath spoken it; that in the latter times, not immediately, but at some distant period, some should apostatize from the faith; some, who had been Christians, should in truth be so no longer, but should give heed to erroneous spirits, and doctrines concerning demons. Press this expression closely, and you may, perhaps, discover in it the erroneous tenets, and the demon or saint worship, of the church of Rome. Through the hypocrisy of liars: you recognize, no doubt, the priesthood, and the martyrologists. Having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron: callous, indeed, must his conscience be, who traffics in indulgence. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats: this language needs no pressing; it discovers, at once, the unhappy votaries of monastic life, and the mortal sin of eating flesh on fast days.

If, notwithstanding what has been said, you should still be of opinion, that the apostles expected Christ would come in their time; it will not follow, that this their error ought in any wise to diminish their authority as preachers of the Gospel. I am sensible this position may alarm even some well-wishers to Christianity; and supply its enemies with what they will think an irrefragable argument. The apostles, they will say, were inspired with the spirit of truth; and yet they fell into a gross mistake, concerning a matter of great importance; how is this to be reconciled? Perhaps, in the following manner:—When the time of our Saviour's ministry was nearly at an end, he thought proper to raise the spirits of his disciples, who were quite cast down with what he had told them about his design of leaving them; by promising, that he would send to them the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth; who should teach them all things, and lead them into all truth. And we know, that this his promise was accomplished on the day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost; and we know farther, that from that time forward they were enabled to speak with tongues, to work miracles, to preach the word with power, and to comprehend the mystery of the new dispensation which was committed unto them. But we have no reason from hence to conclude, that they were immediately inspired with the apprehension of whatever might be

known; that they became acquainted with all kinds of truth. They were undoubtedly led into such truths as it was necessary for them to know, in order to their converting the world to Christianity; but, in other things, they were probably left to the exercise of their understanding, as other men usually are. But surely they might be proper witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ, though they were not acquainted with every thing which might have been known; though, in particular, they were ignorant of the precise time when our Lord would come to judge the world. It can be no impeachment, either of their integrity as men, or their ability as historians, or their honesty as preachers of the Gospel, that they were unacquainted with what had never been revealed to them; that they followed their own understandings where they had no better light to guide them; speaking from conjecture, when they could not speak from certainty; of themselves; when they had no commandment of the Lord. They knew but in part; and they prophesied but in part; and concerning this particular point, Jesus himself had told them, just as he was about finally to leave them, that it was not for them to "know the times and the seasons, which the Father had put in his own power." Nor is it to be wondered at, that the apostles were left in a state of uncertainty concerning the time in which Christ should appear; since beings far more exalted, and more highly favored of heaven than they, were under an equal degree of ignorance: "Of that day," says our Saviour, "and of that hour, knoweth no one; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." I am afraid, Sir, I have tired you with Scripture quotations; but if I have been fortunate enough to convince you, either that the speedy coming of Christ was never expected, much less "predicted," by the apostles; or that their mistake in that particular expectation can in no degree diminish the general weight of their testimony as historians, I shall not be sorry for the ennui I may have occasioned you.

The doctrine of the Millennium is the second of the circumstances which you produce as giving weight to that of a future state; and you represent this doctrine as having been "carefully calculated by a succession of the fathers, from Justin Martyr and Irenæus, down to Lactantius;" and observe, that when "the edifice of the church was almost completed, the temporary support was laid aside:" and in the notes you refer us, as a proof of what you advance, to "Irenæus, the disciple of Papias, who had seen the apostle St. John," and to the second dialogue of Justin with Trypho.

I wish, Sir, you had turned to Eusebius, for the character of this Papias, who had seen the apostle St. John: you would there have found him represented as little better than a credulous old woman; very averse from reading, but mightily given to picking up stories and traditions next to fabulous; amongst which, Eusebius reckons this of the Millennium one. Nor is it, I apprehend, quite certain, that Papias ever saw, much less discoursed, as seems to be insinuated, with the apostle St. John. Eusebius thinks rather, that it was John the presbyter he had seen. But what if he had seen the

apostle himself? Many a weak-headed man had undoubtedly seen him as well as Papias; and it would be hard indeed upon Christians, if they were compelled to receive, as apostolical traditions, the wild reveries of ancient enthusiasm, or such crude conceptions of ignorant fanaticism as nothing but the rust of antiquity can render venerable.

As to the works of Justin, the very dialogue you refer to contains a proof, that the doctrine of the Millennium had not, even in his time, the universal reception you have supposed: but, that many Christians of pure and pious principles rejected it. I wonder how this passage escaped you; but it may be that you followed Tillotson, who himself followed Mede, and read in the original *ou* instead of *av*; and thus inwardly violated the idiom of the language, the sense of the context, and the authority of the best editions.\* In the note you observe, that it is unnecessary for you to mention all the intermediate fathers between Justin and Lactantius, as the fact, you say, is not disputed. In a man who has read so many books, and to so good a purpose, he must be captious indeed, who cannot excuse small mistakes. That unprejudiced regard to truth, however, which is the great characteristic of every distinguished historian, will, I am persuaded, make you thank me for recalling to your memory, that Origen, the most learned of all the fathers, and Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, usually, for his immense erudition, surnamed the Great, were both of them prior to Lactantius, and both of them impugnors of the Millennium doctrine. Look, Sir, into Mosheim, or almost any writer of ecclesiastical history, and you will find the opposition of Origen and Dionysius to this system particularly noticed: look into so common an author as Whitby, and in his learned treatise upon this subject you will find that he has well proved these two propositions: first, that this opinion of the Millennium was never generally received in the church of Christ; secondly, that there is no just ground to think it was derived from the apostles. From hence, I think, we may conclude, that this Millennium doctrine (which, by the by, though it be new-modelled, is not yet thrown aside) could not have been any very serviceable scaffold in the erection of that mighty edifice, which has crushed by the weights of its materials, and debased by the elegance of its structure, the

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\* Justin, in answering the question proposed by Trypho, Whether the Christians believed the doctrine of the Millennium, says, *Ὁμολογήσα ἐν σοὶ καὶ πρότερον, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἦεν καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ ταῦτα φρονεῖν, ὡς καὶ πάντως ἐπίστασθε, τὸ το γέννησομενον. Πολλὰς δ' αὖ καὶ τῶν τῆς ΚΑΘΑΡΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΥΣΕΒΟΥΣ οὐτῶν Χριστιανῶν ΓΝΩΜΗΣ τὸ το μὴ γινωρίζειν, ἐσημᾶνα σοὶ.* The note subjoined to this passage out of Justin, in Thirlby's ed. an. 1722, is [*Πολλὰς δ' αὖ καὶ τῶν τῆς καθαρᾶς.*] Medus (quem sequitur Tillotsonus, Reg. Fidei per iii. sect. ix. p. 756, & seq.) legit *τῶν τῆς καθαρᾶς.* Vehementer errant viri præclari.

And in Jebb's Edit. an. 1719, we have the following note: "Doctrina itaque de Millennio, neque erat universalis ecclesiæ traditio, nec opinio de fide recepta," &c.

stateliest temples of heathen superstition. With these remarks, I take leave of the Millennium; just observing, that your third circumstance, the general conflagration, seems to be effectually included in your first, the speedy coming of Christ. I am, &c.

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### LETTER III.

SIR ;—You esteem “the miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive church,” as the third of the secondary causes of the rapid growth of Christianity. I should be willing to account the miracles, not merely ascribed to the primitive church, but really performed by the apostles, as the one great primary cause of the conversion of the Gentiles. But waiving this consideration, let us see whether the miraculous powers, which you ascribe to the primitive church, were in any eminent degree calculated to spread the belief of Christianity, amongst a great and enlightened people.

They consisted, you tell us, “of divine inspirations, conveyed sometimes in the form of a sleeping, sometimes of a waking vision; and were liberally bestowed on all ranks of the faithful, on women as on elders, on boys as well as upon bishops.” “The design of these visions,” you say, “was for the most part either to disclose the future history, or to guide the present administration of the church.” You speak of “the expulsion of demons as an ordinary triumph of religion, usually performed in a public manner; and when the patient was relieved by the skill or the power of the exorcist, the vanquished demon was heard to confess that he was one of the fabled gods of antiquity, who had impiously usurped the adoration of mankind;” and you represent even the miracle of the resurrection of the dead as frequently performed on necessary occasions.—Cast your eye, Sir, upon the church of Rome, and ask yourself (I put the question to your heart, and beg you will consult that for an answer; ask yourself,) whether her absurd pretensions to that very kind of miraculous powers you have here displayed as operating to the increase of Christianity, have not converted half her numbers to Protestantism, and the other half to infidelity? Neither the sword of the civil magistrate, nor the possession of the keys of heaven, nor the terrors of her spiritual thunder, have been able to keep within her pale even those who have been bred up in her faith; how then should you think, that the very cause which hath almost extinguished Christianity among Christians, should have established it among Pagans? I beg I may not be misunderstood; I do not take upon me to say, that all the miracles recorded in the history of the primitive church after the apostolical age were forgeries; it is foreign to the present purpose to deliver any opinion upon that subject; but I do beg leave to insist upon this, that such of them as were forgeries must, in that learned age, by their easy detection,

have rather impeded than accelerated the progress of Christianity; and it appears very probable to me, that nothing but the recent prevailing evidence of real, unquestioned, apostolical miracles, could have secured the infant church from being destroyed by those which were falsely ascribed to it.

It is not every man who can nicely separate the corruptions of religion from religion itself; nor justly apportion the degrees of credit due to the diversities of evidence; and those who have ability for the task are usually ready enough to emancipate themselves from Gospel restraints (which thwart the propensities of sense, check the ebullitions of passion, and combat the prejudices of the world at every turn), by blending its native simplicity with the superstitions which have been derived from it. No argument is so well suited to the indolence or the immorality of mankind, as that priests of all ages and religions are the same: we see the pretensions of the Romish priesthood to miraculous powers, and we know them to be false; we are conscious, that they at least must sacrifice their integrity to their interest, or their ambition; and being persuaded, that there is a great sameness in the passions of mankind, and in their incentives to action; and knowing that the history of past ages is abundantly stored with similar claims to supernatural authority, we traverse back, in imagination, the most distant regions of antiquity; and finding, from a superficial view, nothing to discriminate one set of men, or one period of time, from another, we hastily conclude, that all revealed religion is a cheat, and that the miracles attributed to the apostles themselves are supported by no better testimony, nor more worthy our attention, than the prodigies of Pagan story, or the lying wonders of Papal artifice. I have no intention, in this place, to enlarge upon the many circumstances by which a candid inquirer after truth might be enabled to distinguish a pointed difference between the miracles of Christ and his apostles, and the tricks of ancient or modern superstition. One observation I would just suggest to you upon this subject: the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament are so intimately united with the narration of common events, and the ordinary transactions of life, that you cannot, as in profane history, separate the one from the other. My meaning will be illustrated by an instance; Tacitus and Suetonius have handed down to us an account of many great actions performed by Vespasian; amongst the rest, they inform us of his having wrought some miracles, of his having cured a lame man, and restored sight to one that was blind. But what they tell us of these miracles is so unconnected with every thing that goes before and after, that you may reject the relation of them without injuring, in any degree, the consistency of the narration of the other circumstances of his life: on the other hand, if you reject the relation of the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus Christ, you must necessarily reject the account of his whole life, and of several transactions, concerning which we have the undoubted testimony of other writers besides the evangelists. But if this argument should not strike you, perhaps the following observation may



tend to remove a little of the prejudice usually conceived against Gospel miracles, by men of lively imaginations, from the gross forgeries attributed to the first ages of the church.

The phenomena of physics are sometimes happily illustrated by an hypothesis; and the most recondite truths of mathematical science not unfrequently investigated from an absurd position: what if we try the same method of arguing in the case before us? Let us suppose then, that a new revelation was to be promulged to mankind; and that twelve unlearned and unfriended men, inhabitants of any country most odious and despicable in the eyes of Europe, should by the power of God be endowed with the faculty of speaking languages they had never learned, and performing works surpassing all human ability; and that, being strongly impressed with a particular truth, which they were commissioned to promulgate, they should travel, not only through the barbarous regions of Africa, but through all the learned and polished states of Europe; preaching everywhere with unremitted sedulity a new religion, working stupendous miracles in attestation of their mission, and communicating to their first converts (as a seal of their conversion) a variety of spiritual gifts: does it appear probable to you, that after the death of these men, and probably after the deaths of most of their immediate successors, who had been zealously attached to the faith they had seen so miraculously confirmed, that none would ever attempt to impose upon the credulous or the ignorant, by a fictitious claim to supernatural powers? would none of them aspire to the gift of tongues? would none of them mistake frenzy for illumination, and the delusions of a heated brain for the impulses of the Spirit? would none undertake to cure inveterate disorders, to expel demons, or to raise the dead? As far as I can apprehend, we ought, from such a position, to deduce, by every rule of probable reasoning, the precise conclusion, which was in fact verified in the case of the apostles; every species of miracles, which Heaven had enabled the first preachers to perform, would be counterfeited, either from misguided zeal or interested cunning, either through the imbecility or the iniquity of mankind; and we might just as reasonably conclude, that there never was any piety, charity, or chastity in the world, from seeing such plenty of pretenders to these virtues, as that there never were any real miracles performed, from considering the great store of those which have been forged.

But, I know not how it has happened, there are many in the present age (I am far from including you, Sir, in the number), whose prejudices against all miraculous events have arisen to that height, that it appears to them utterly impossible for any human testimony, however great, to establish their credibility. I beg pardon for styling their reasoning, prejudice; I have no design to give offence by that word; they may, with equal right, throw the same imputation upon mine; and I think it just as illiberal in divines to attribute the scepticism of every deist to wilful infidelity, as it is in the deists to refer the faith of every divine to professional bias. I have not had so little intercourse with mankind, nor shunned so much the

delightful freedom of social converse, as to be ignorant, that there are many men of upright morals and good understandings, to whom, as you express it, "a latent and even involuntary scepticism adheres;" and who would be glad to be persuaded to be Christians: and how severe soever some men may be in their judgments concerning one another; yet we Christians, at least, hope and believe, that the great Judge of all will make allowance for "our habits of study and reflection," for various circumstances, the efficacy of which, in giving a particular bent to the understandings of men, we can neither comprehend nor estimate. For the sake of such men, if such should ever be induced to throw an hour away in the perusal of these Letters, suffer me to step for a moment out of my way, whilst I hazard an observation or two upon the subject.

Knowledge is rightly divided by Mr. Locke into intuitive, sensitive, and demonstrative. It is clear, that a past miracle can neither be the object of sense nor of intuition, nor consequently of demonstration; we cannot then, philosophically speaking, be said to know, that a miracle has ever been performed. But, in all the great concerns of life, we are influenced by probability rather than knowledge: and of probability, the same great author establishes two foundations; a conformity to our own experience, and the testimony of others. Now it is contended, that by the opposition of these two principles probability is destroyed; or, in other terms, that human testimony can never influence the mind to assent to a proposition repugnant to uniform experience.—Whose experience do you mean? You will not say, your own; for the experience of an individual reaches but a little way; and, no doubt, you daily assent to a thousand truths in politics, in physics, and in the business of common life, which you have never seen verified by experience.—You will not produce the experience of your friends; for that can extend itself but a little way beyond your own.—But by uniform experience, I conceive, you are desirous of understanding the experience of all ages and nations since the foundation of the world. I answer, first; how is it that you become acquainted with the experience of all ages and nations? You will reply, from history. Be it so: peruse then by far the most ancient records of antiquity; and if you find no mention of miracles in them, I give up the point. Yes; but every thing related therein respecting miracles is to be reckoned fabulous. Why? Because miracles contradict the experience of all ages and nations. Do you not perceive, Sir, that you beg the very question in debate? for we affirm, that the great and learned nation of Egypt, that the heathen inhabiting the land of Canaan, that the numerous people of the Jews, and the nations which, for ages, surrounded them, have all had great experience of miracles. You cannot otherways obviate this conclusion, than by questioning the authenticity of that book, concerning which, Newton, when he was writing his commentary on Daniel, expressed himself to the person\* from whom I had the anecdote, and which deserves not to be lost:

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\* Dr. Smith, late Master of Trinity College.

"I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible, than in any profane history whatsoever."

However, I mean not to press you with the argument *ad verendum*; it is needless to solicit your modesty, when it may be possible, perhaps, to make an impression upon your judgment: I answer, therefore, in the second place, that the admission of the principle by which you reject miracles will lead us into absurdity. The laws of gravitation are the most obvious of all the laws of nature; every person in every part of the globe must of necessity have had experience of them. There was a time when no one was acquainted with the laws of magnetism: these suspend in many instances the laws of gravity: nor can I see, upon the principle in question, how the rest of mankind could have credited the testimony of their first discoverer; and yet to have rejected it, would have been to reject the truth. But that a piece of iron should ascend gradually from the earth, and fly at last with an increasing rapidity through the air; and attaching itself to another piece of iron, or to a particular species of iron ore, should remain suspended, in opposition to the action of its gravity, is consonant to the laws of nature. I grant it; but there was a time when it was contrary, I say not to the laws of nature, but to the uniform experience of all preceding ages and countries; and at that particular point of time, the testimony of an individual, or of a dozen individuals, who should have reported themselves eye-witnesses of such a fact, ought, according to your argumentation, to have been received as fabulous. And what are those laws of nature, which, you think, can never be suspended? are they not different to different men, according to the diversities of their comprehension and knowledge? and if any one of them (that, for instance, which rules the operations of magnetism or electricity) should have been known to you or to me alone, whilst all the rest of the world were unacquainted with it; the effects of it would have been new, and unheard-of in the annals, and contrary to the experience of mankind; and therefore ought not, in your opinion, to have been believed. Nor do I understand what difference, as to credibility, there could be between the effects of such an unknown law of nature, and a miracle; for it is a matter of no moment, in that view, whether the suspension of the known laws of nature be effected, that is, whether a miracle be performed, by the mediation of other laws that are unknown, or by the ministry of a person divinely commissioned; since it is impossible for us to be certain, that it is contradictory to the constitution of the universe, that the laws of nature, which appear to us general, should not be suspended, and their action overruled by others, still more general, though less known; that is, that miracles should not be performed before such a being as man, at those times, in those places, and under those circumstances, which God, in his universal providence, had preordained. I am, &c.

## LETTER IV.

SIR;—I readily acknowledge the utility of your fourth cause, “the virtues of the first Christians,” as greatly conducing to the spreading of their religion; but then you seem to quite mar the compliment you pay them, by representing their virtues as proceeding either from their repentance for having been the most abandoned sinners, or from the laudable desire of supporting the reputation of the society in which they were engaged.

That repentance is the first step to virtue, is true enough; but I see no reason for supposing, according to the calumnies of Celsus and Julian, “that the Christians allured into their party men, who washed away in the waters of baptism the guilt for which the temples of the gods refused to grant them any expiation.” The apostles, Sir, did not, like Romulus, open an asylum for debtors, thieves, and murderers; for they had not the same sturdy means of securing their adherents from the grasp of civil power; they did not persuade them to abandon the temples of the gods, because they could there obtain no expiation for their guilt, but because every degree of guilt was expiated in them with too great facility: and every vice practised, not only without remorse of private conscience, but with the powerful sanction of public approbation.

“After the example,” you say, “of their Divine Master, the missionaries of the Gospel addressed themselves to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often by the effects, of their vices.”—This, Sir, I really think, is not a fair representation of the matter; it may catch the applause of the unlearned, embolden many a stripling to cast off for ever the sweet blush of modesty, confirm many a dissolute veteran in the practice of his impure habits, and suggest great occasion of merriment and wanton mockery to the flagitious of every denomination and every age; but still it will want that foundation of truth, which alone can recommend it to the serious and judicious. The apostles, Sir, were not like the Italian *Fratricelli* of the thirteenth, nor the French *Turlupins* of the fourteenth century; in all the dirt that has been raked up against Christianity, even by the worst of its enemies, not a speck of that kind have they been able to fix, either upon the apostles, or their Divine Master. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Sir, was not preached in single houses or obscure villages, not in subterraneous caves and impure brothels, not in lazars and in prisons; but in the synagogues and in the temples, in the streets and the market-places of the great capitals of the Roman provinces; in Jerusalem, in Corinth, and in Antioch, in Athens, in Ephesus, and in Rome. Nor do I anywhere find, that its missionaries were ordered particularly to address themselves to the shameless women you mention; I do indeed find the direct contrary; for they were ordered to turn away from, to have no fellowship or intercourse with such as were wont “to creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with

sins, led away with divers lusts." And what if a few women, who had either been seduced by their passions, or had fallen victims to the licentious manners of their age, should be found amongst those who were most ready to receive a religion that forbade all impurity? I do not apprehend that this circumstance ought to bring an insinuation of discredit, either upon the sex, or upon those who wrought their reformation.

That the majority of the first converts to Christianity were of an inferior condition in life may readily be allowed; and you yourself have in another place given a good reason for it; those who are distinguished by riches, honors, or knowledge, being so very inconsiderable in number when compared with the bulk of mankind: but though not many mighty, not many noble were called; yet some mighty, and some noble, some of as great reputation as any of the age in which they lived, were attached to the Christian faith. Short indeed are the accounts, which have been transmitted to us, of the first propagating of Christianity; yet even in these we meet with the names of many, who would have done credit to any cause: I will not pretend to enumerate them all; a few of them will be sufficient to make you recollect, that there were, at least, some converts to Christianity, both from among the Jews and the Gentiles, whose lives were not stained with inextinguishable crimes. Amongst these we reckon Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; Joseph of Arimathea, a man of fortune and a counsellor; a nobleman and a centurion of Capernaum; Jairus, Crispus, Sosthenes, rulers of synagogues; Apollos, an eloquent and learned man; Zenas, a Jewish lawyer; the treasurer of Candace queen of Æthiopia; Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian band; Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus at Athens; and Sergius Paulus, a man of proconsular or prætorian authority, of whom it may be remarked, that if he resigned his high and lucrative office, in consequence of his turning Christian, it is a strong presumption in its favor; if he retained it, we may conclude, that the profession of Christianity was not so utterly incompatible with the discharge of the offices of civil life as you sometimes represent it. This catalogue of men of rank, fortune, and knowledge, who embraced Christianity, might, was it necessary, be much enlarged; and probably another conversation with St. Paul would have enabled us to grace it with the names of Festus, and king Agrippa himself: not that the writers of the books of the New Testament seem to have been at all solicitous in mentioning the great or the learned who were converted to the faith; had that been part of their design, they would, in the true style of impostors, have kept out of sight the publicans and sinners, the tanners and the tentmakers, with whom they conversed and dwelt; and introduced to our notice none but those who had been "brought up with Herod, or the chief men of Asia"—whom they had the honor to number amongst their friends.

That the primitive Christians took great care to have an unsullied reputation, by abstaining from the commission of whatever might tend to pollute it, is easily admitted; but we do not so easily grant,

that this care is a "circumstance which usually attends small assemblies of men, when they separate themselves from the body of a nation, or the religion to which they belonged." It did not attend the Nicolaitanes, the Simonians, the Menandrians, and the Carpo-cratians in the first ages of the church, of which you are speaking; and it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that the scandalous vices of these very early sectaries brought a general and undistinguished censure upon the Christian name; and, so far from promoting the increase of the church, excited in the minds of the Pagans an abhorrence of whatever respected it: it cannot be unknown to you, Sir, that several sectaries both at home and abroad might be mentioned; who have departed from the religion to which they belonged; and which, unhappily for themselves and the community, have taken as little care to preserve their reputation unspotted as those of the first and second centuries. If then the first Christians did take the care you mention (and I am wholly of your opinion in that point), their solicitude might as candidly, perhaps, and as reasonably be derived from a sense of their duty, and an honest endeavor to discharge it, as from the mere desire of increasing the honor of their confraternity by the illustrious integrity of its members.

You are eloquent in describing the austere morality of the primitive Christians, as adverse to the propensities of sense, and abhorrent from all the innocent pleasures and amusements of life; and you enlarge, with a studied minuteness, upon their censures of luxury, and their sentiments concerning marriage and chastity: but in this circumstantial enumeration of their errors or their faults (which I am under no necessity of denying or excusing) you seem to forget the very purpose for which you profess to have introduced the mention of them; for the picture you have drawn is so hideous, and the coloring so dismal, that instead of alluring to a closer inspection, it must have made every man of pleasure or of sense turn from it with horror or disgust; and so far from contributing to the rapid growth of Christianity by the austerity of their manners, it must be a wonder to any one, how the first Christians ever made a single convert. It was first objected by Celsus, that Christianity was a mean religion, inculcating such a pusillanimity and patience under affronts, such a contempt of riches and worldly honors, as must weaken the nerves of civil government, and expose a society of Christians to the prey of the first invaders. This objection has been repeated by Bayle; and though fully answered by Bernard and others, it is still the favorite theme of every *esprit fort* of our own age: even you, Sir, think the aversion of Christians to the business of war and government, "a criminal disregard to the public welfare." To all that has been said upon this subject it may with justice, I think, be answered, that Christianity troubles not itself with ordering the constitutions of civil societies, but levels the weight of all its influence at the hearts of the individuals which compose them; and, as Origen said to Celsus, was every individual in every nation a Gospel Christian, there would be neither internal

injustice, nor external war; there would be none of those passions which embitter the intercourses of civil life, and desolate the globe. What reproach then can it be to a religion, that it inculcates doctrines, which, if universally practised, would introduce universal tranquillity, and the most exalted happiness amongst mankind?

It must proceed from a total misapprehension of the design of the Christian dispensation, or from a very ignorant interpretation of the particular injunctions, forbidding us to make riches or honors a primary pursuit, or the prompt gratification of revenge a first principle of action, to infer, that an individual Christian is obliged by his religion to offer his throat to an assassin, and his property to the first plunderer; or that a society of Christians may not repel, in the best manner they are able, the unjust assaults of hostile invasion.

I know of no precepts in the Gospel, which debar a man from the possession of domestic comforts, or deaden the activity of his private friendships, or prohibit the exertion of his utmost ability in the service of the public: the *nisi quietum nihil beatum* is no part of the Christian's creed: his virtue is an active virtue; and we justly refer to the school of Epicurus the doctrines concerning abstinence from marriage, from the cultivation of friendship, from the management of public affairs, as suited to that selfish indolence which was the favorite tenet of his philosophy. I am, &c.

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## LETTER V.

SIR;—"The union and the discipline of the Christian church," or, as you are pleased to style it, of the Christian republic, is the last of the five secondary causes, to which you have referred the rapid and extensive spread of Christianity. It must be acknowledged, that union essentially contributes to the strength of every association, civil, military, and religious; but, unfortunately for your argument, and much to the reproach of Christians, nothing has been more wanting amongst them, from the apostolic age to our own, than union. "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ," are expressions of disunion, which we meet with in the earliest period of church history: and we cannot look into the writings of any, either friend or foe to Christianity, but we find the one of them lamenting, and the other exulting in an immense catalogue of sectaries; and both of them thereby furnishing us with great reason to believe, that the divisions with respect to doctrine, worship, and discipline, which have ever subsisted in the church, must have greatly tended to hurt the credit of Christianity, and to alienate the minds of the Gentiles from the reception of such a various and discordant faith.

I readily grant, that there was a certain community of doctrine, an intercourse of hospitality, and a confederacy of discipline estab-

lished amongst the individuals of every church; so that none could be admitted into any assembly of Christians, without undergoing a previous examination into his manner of life\* (which shows, by the by, that every reprobate could not, as the fit seized him, or his interest induced him, become a Christian), and without protesting in the most solemn manner, that he would neither be guilty of murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perfidy; and it may be granted also, that those, who broke this compact, were ejected by common consent from the confraternity into which they had been admitted: it may be farther granted, that this confederacy extended itself to independent churches; and that those who had, for their immoralities, been excluded from Christian community in any one church, were rarely, if ever, admitted to it by another; just as a member who has been expelled any one college in a university, is generally thought unworthy of being admitted by any other: but it is not admitted, that this severity and this union of discipline could ever have induced the Pagans to forsake the gods of their country, and to expose themselves to the contemptuous hatred of their neighbors, and to all the severities of persecution, exercised, with unrelenting barbarity, against the Christians.

The account you give of the origin and progress of episcopal jurisdiction, of the pre-eminence of the metropolitan churches, and of the ambition of the Roman pontiff, I believe to be in general accurate and true; and I am not in the least surprised at the bitterness which now and then escapes you in treating this subject: for to see the most benign religion, that imagination can form, becoming an instrument of oppression; and the most humble one administering to the pride, the avarice, and the ambition of those who wished to be considered as its guardians, and who avowed themselves its professors, would extort a censure from men more attached probably to church authority than yourself: not that I think it either a very candid, or a very useful undertaking, to be solely and industriously engaged in portraying the characters of the professors of Christianity in the worst colors: it is not candid, because ‘the great law of impartiality, which obliges an historian to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the Gospel,’ obliges him also not to conceal, or to pass over with niggard and reluctant mention, the illustrious virtues of those who gave up fortune and fame, all their comforts, and all their hopes in this life, nay, life itself, rather than violate any one of the precepts of that Gospel, which, from the testimony of inspired teachers, they conceived they had good reason to believe: it is not useful, because “to a careless observer,” (that is, to the generality of mankind) “*their* faults may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed;” and may really infect the minds of the young and unlearned especially, with prejudices against a religion, upon their rational reception or rejec-

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\* Nonnulli præpositi sunt, qui in vitam et mores eorum, qui admittuntur, inquirant, ut non concessa facientes candidatos religionis arceant a suis conventibus. Orig. con. Cels. lib. ii.



tion of which, a matter of the utmost importance may (believe me, Sir, it may, for aught you or any person else can prove to the contrary) entirely depend. It is an easy matter to amuse ourselves and others with the immoralities of priests and the ambition of prelates, with the absurd virulence of synods and councils, with the ridiculous doctrines which visionary enthusiasts or interested churchmen have sanctified with the name of Christian: but a display of ingenuity or erudition upon such subjects is much misplaced; since it excites, almost in every person, an unavoidable suspicion of the purity of the source itself, from which such polluted streams have been derived. Do not mistake my meaning; I am far from wishing that the clergy should be looked up to with a blind reverence, or their imperfections screened by the sanctity of their functions, from the animadversion of the world; quite the contrary: their conduct, I am of opinion, ought to be more nicely scrutinized, and their deviation from the rectitude of the Gospel more severely censured, than that of other men; but great care should be taken, not to represent *their* vices, or *their* indiscretions, as originating in the principles of their religion. Do not mistake me: I am not here begging quarter for Christianity; or contending, that even the principles of our religion should be received with implicit faith; or that every objection to Christianity should be stifled, by a representation of the mischief it might do if publicly promulged: on the contrary, we invite, nay, we challenge you, to a direct and liberal attack; though oblique glances, and disingenuous insinuations, we are willing to avoid; well knowing, that the character of our religion, like that of an honest man, is defended with greater difficulty against the suggestions of ridicule, and the secret malignity of pretended friends, than against positive accusations, and the avowed malice of open enemies.

In your account of the primitive church you set forth, that "the want of discipline and human learning was supplied by the occasional assistance of the prophets; who were called to that function without distinction of age, sex, or natural abilities."—That the gift of prophecy was one of the spiritual gifts by which some of the first Christians were enabled to co-operate with the apostles in the general design of preaching the Gospel; and that this gift, or rather, as Mr. Locke thinks, the gift of tongues (by the ostentation of which, many of them were prompted to speak in their assemblies at the same time), was the occasion of some disorder in the church of Corinth, which required the interposition of the apostle to compose, is confessed on all hands. But if you mean, that the prophets were ever the sole pastors of the faithful; or that no provision was made by the apostles for the good government and edification of the church, except what might be accidentally derived from the occasional assistance of the prophets, you are much mistaken; and have undoubtedly forgot what is said of Paul and Barnabas having ordained elders in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch; and of Paul's commission to Titus, whom he had left in Crete, to ordain elders in every city; and of his instructions both to him and Timothy, con-

cerning the qualifications of those whom they were to appoint bishops; one of which was, that a bishop should be able, by sound doctrine, to exhort and to convince the gainsayer. Nor is it said, that this sound doctrine was to be communicated to the bishop by prophecy, or that all persons, without distinction, might be called to that office; but a bishop was "to be able to teach," not what he had learned by prophecy, but what Paul had publicly preached; "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." And in every place almost, where prophets are mentioned, they are joined with apostles and teachers, and other ministers of the Gospel; so that there is no reason for your representing them as a distinct order of men, who were by their occasional assistance to supply the want of discipline and human learning in the church. It would be taking too large a field to inquire, whether the prophets you speak of were endowed with ordinary or extraordinary gifts; whether they always spoke by the immediate impulse of the Spirit, or according to "the analogy of faith;" whether their gift consisted in the foretelling of future events, or in the interpreting of Scripture to the edification and exhortation and comfort of the church, or in both; I will content myself with observing, that he will judge very improperly concerning the prophets of the apostolic church, who takes his idea of their office or importance from your description of them.

In speaking of the community of goods, which, you say, was adopted for a short time in the primitive church, you hold as inconclusive the arguments of Mosheim; who has endeavored to prove, that it was a community quite different from that recommended by Pythagoras or Plato; consisting principally in a common use, derived from an unbounded liberality, which induced the opulent to share their riches with their indigent brethren. There have been others, as well as Mosheim, who have entertained this opinion; and it is not quite so indefensible as you represent it: but whether it be reasonable, or absurd, need not now be examined; it is far more necessary to take notice of an expression which you have used, and which may be apt to mislead unwary readers into a very injurious suspicion concerning the integrity of the apostles. In process of time, you observe, "the converts who embraced the new religion were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony."—This expression, "permitted to retain," in ordinary acceptation, implies an antecedent obligation to part with: now, Sir, I have not the shadow of a doubt in affirming, that we have no account in Scripture of any such obligation being imposed upon the converts to Christianity, either by Christ himself, or by his apostles, or by any other authority; nay, in the very place where this community of goods is treated of, there is an express proof (I know not how your impartiality has happened to overlook it) to the contrary. When Peter was about to inflict an exemplary punishment upon Ananias (not for keeping back a part of the price, as some men are fond of representing it, but) for his lying and hypocrisy, in offering a part

of the price of his land as the whole of it; he said to him, "Whilst it remained (unsold) was it not thine own? and after it was sold; was it not in thine own power?" From this account it is evident, that Ananias was under no obligation to part with his patrimony; and, after he had parted with it, the price was in his own power: the apostle would have "permitted him to retain" the whole of it, if he had thought fit; though he would not permit his prevarication to go unpunished.

You have remarked, that "the feasts of love, the *agapæ*, as they were called, constituted a very pleasing and essential part of public worship."—Lest any one should from hence be led to suspect, that these feasts of love, this pleasing part of the public worship of the primitive church, resembled the unhallowed meetings of some impure sectaries of our own times, I will take the liberty to add to your account a short explication of the nature of these *agapæ*. Tertullian, in the 39th chapter of his Apology, has done it to my hands. "The nature of our supper," says he, "is indicated by its name; it is called by a word, which, in the Greek language, signifies *love*. We are not anxious about the expense of the entertainment; since we look upon that as gain which is expended with a pious purpose, in the relief and refreshment of all our indigent.—The occasion of our entertainment being so honorable, you may judge of the manner of its being conducted: it consists in the discharge of religious duties; it admits nothing vile, nothing immodest. Before we sit down, prayer is made to God. The hungry eat as much as they desire, and every one drinks as much as can be useful to sober men. We so feast, as men who have their minds impressed with the idea of spending the night in the worship of God; we so converse, as men who are conscious that the Lord heareth them," &c. Perhaps you may object to this testimony in favor of the innocence of Christian meetings, as liable to partiality, because it is the testimony of a Christian; and you may, perhaps, be able to pick out, from the writings of this Christian, something that looks like a contradiction of this account: however, I will rest the matter upon this testimony for the present; forbearing to quote any other Christian writer upon the subject, as I shall in a future Letter produce you a testimony superior to every objection. You speak too of the *agapæ* as an essential part of the public worship: this is not according to your usual accuracy; for, had they been essential, the edict of a Heathen magistrate would not have been able to put a stop to them; yet Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, expressly says, that the Christians left them off, upon his publishing an edict prohibiting assemblies; and we know, that, in the council of Carthage, in the fourth century, on account of the abuses which attended them, they began to be interdicted, and ceased almost universally in the fifth.

I have but two observations to make upon what you have advanced concerning the severity of ecclesiastical penance: the first is, that even you yourself do not deduce its institution from the Scripture, but from the power which every voluntary society has

over its own members; and therefore, however extravagant, or however absurd; however opposite to the attributes of a commiserating God, or the feelings of a fallible man, it may be thought; or upon whatever trivial occasion, such as that you mention of calumniating a bishop, a presbyter, or even a deacon, it may have been inflicted; Christ and his apostles are not answerable for it. The other is, that it was, of all possible expedients, the least fitted to accomplish the end for which you think it was introduced, the propagation of Christianity. The sight of a penitent humbled by a public confession, emaciated by fasting, clothed in sackcloth, prostrated at the door of the assembly, and imploring for years together the pardon of his offences, and a readmission into the bosom of the church, was a much more likely means of deterring the Pagans from Christian community, than the pious liberality you mention was of alluring them into it. This pious liberality, Sir, would exhaust even your elegant powers of description, before you could exhibit it in the amiable manner it deserves; it is derived from the "new commandment of loving one another;" and it has ever been the distinguishing characteristic of Christians, as opposed to every other denomination of men, Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans. In the times of the apostles, and in the first ages of the church, it showed itself in voluntary contributions for the relief of the poor and the persecuted, the infirm and the unfortunate: as soon as the church was permitted to have permanent possessions in land, and acquired the protection of the civil power, it exerted itself in the erection of hospitals of every kind; institutions these, of charity and humanity, which were forgotten in the laws of Solon and Lycurgus; and for even one example of which, you will, I believe, in vain explore the boasted annals of Pagan Rome. Indeed, Sir, you will think too injuriously of this liberality, if you look upon its origin as superstitious; or upon its application as an artifice of the priesthood, to seduce the indigent into the bosom of the church; it was the pure and uncorrupted fruit of genuine Christianity.

You are much *surprised*, and not a little *concerned*, that Tacitus and the younger Pliny have spoken so slightly of the Christian system; and that Seneca and the elder Pliny have not vouchsafed to mention it at all. This difficulty seems to have struck others, as well as yourself; and I might refer you to the conclusion of the second volume of Dr. Lardner's Collection of Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion, for full satisfaction in this point; but perhaps an observation or two may be sufficient to diminish your surprise.

Obscure sectaries of upright morals, when they separate themselves from the religion of their country, do not speedily acquire the attention of men of letters. The historians are apprehensive of depreciating the dignity of their learned labor, and contaminating their splendid narration of illustrious events, by mixing with it a disgusting detail of religious combinations: and the philosophers are usually too deeply engaged in abstract science, or in exploring the infinite intricacy of natural appearances, to busy themselves

with what they, perhaps hastily, esteem popular superstitions. Historians and philosophers, of no mean reputation, might be mentioned, I believe, who were the contemporaries of Luther and the first reformers; and who have passed over, in negligent or contemptuous silence, their daring and unpopular attempts to shake the stability of St. Peter's chair. Opposition to the religion of a people must become general, before it can deserve the notice of the civil magistrate; and till it does that, it will mostly be thought below the animadversion of distinguished writers. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case in point. The first Christians, as Christ had foretold, were "hated of all men for his name's sake:" it was the name itself, not any vices adhering to the name, which Pliny punished; and they were everywhere held in exceeding contempt, till their numbers excited the apprehension of the ruling powers. The philosophers considered them as enthusiasts, and neglected them; the priests opposed them as innovators, and calumniated them; the great overlooked them, the learned despised them; and the curious alone, who examined into the foundation of their faith, believed them. But the negligence of some half dozen of writers (most of them, however, bear incidental testimony to the truth of several facts respecting Christianity), in not relating circumstantially the origin, the progress, and the pretensions of a new sect, is a very insufficient reason for questioning, either the evidence of the principles upon which it was built, or the supernatural power by which it was supported.

The Roman historians, moreover, were not only culpably incurious concerning the Christians, but unpardonably ignorant of what concerned either them or the Jews: I say, unpardonably ignorant; because the means of information were within their reach: the writings of Moses were everywhere to be had in Greek; and the works of Josephus were published before Tacitus wrote his history; and yet even Tacitus has fallen into great absurdity, and self-contradiction, in his account of the Jews; and though Tertullian's zeal carried him much too far, when he called him *Mendaciorum loquacissimus*, yet one cannot help regretting the little pains he took to acquire proper information upon that subject. He derives the name of the Jews, by a forced interpolation, from mount Ida in Crete;\* and he represents them as abhorring all kinds of images in public worship, and yet accuses them of having placed the image of an ass in the holy of holies: and presently after he tells us, that Pompey, when he profaned the temple, found the sanctuary entirely empty. Similar inaccuracies might be noticed in Plutarch, and other writers who have spoken of the Jews; and you yourself have referred to an obscure passage in Suetonius, as offering a proof how strangely the Jews and Christians of Rome were confounded with each other. Why then should we think it remarkable, that a few celebrated writers, who looked upon the Christians as an obscure

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\* *Inclytum in Creta Idam montem, accolæ Idæos aucto in barbarum cognomento Judæos vocitari.* Tac. Hist. lib. 5, sub init.

sect of the Jews, and upon the Jews as a barbarous and detested people, whose history was not worth the perusal, and who were moreover engaged in the relation of the great events which either occasioned or accompanied the ruin of their eternal empire; why should we be surprised, that men occupied in such interesting subjects, and influenced by such inveterate prejudices, should have left us but short and imperfect descriptions of the Christian system?

"But how shall we excuse," you say, "the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences, which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses?" "The laws of nature were perpetually suspended for the benefit of the church: but the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle." To their shame be it spoken, that they did so: "and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world." To this objection I answer, in the first place, that we have no reason to believe that miracles were performed as often as philosophers deigned to give their attention to them; or that, at the period of time you allude to, the laws of nature were "perpetually" suspended, for the benefit of the church. It may be, that not one of the few heathen writers, whose books have escaped the ravages of time, was ever present when a miracle was wrought; but will it follow, because Pliny, or Plutarch, or Galen, or Seneca, or Suetonius, or Tacitus, had never seen a miracle, that no miracles were ever performed? They, indeed, were learned and observant men; and it may be a matter of surprise to us, that miracles so celebrated, as the friends of Christianity suppose the Christian ones to have been, should never have been mentioned by them, though they had not seen them; and had an Adrian or a Vespasian been the authors of but a thousandth part of the miracles you have ascribed to the primitive church, more than one, probably, of these very historians, philosophers as they were, would have adorned his history with the narration of them: for though they turned aside from the awful spectacle of the miracles of a poor despised apostle; yet they beheld with exulting complacency, and have related with unsuspecting credulity, the ostentatious tricks of a Roman emperor. It was not for want of faith in miraculous events, that these sages neglected the Christian miracles, but for want of candor and impartial examination.

I answer, in the second place, that in the Acts of the Apostles we have an account of a great multitude of Pagans of every condition of life, who were so far from being inattentive to the evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence to their senses, that they contemplated them with reverence and wonder; and, forsaking the religion of their ancestors, and all the flattering hopes of worldly profit, reputation, and tranquillity, adhered with astonishing resolution to the profession of Christianity. From the conclusion of the Acts, till the time in which some of the sages you mention flourished, is a very obscure part of church history; yet we are certain, that many of the Pagan, and we have some reason to believe, that

not a few of the philosophic world, during that period, did not turn aside from the awful spectacle of miracles, but saw and believed: and that a few others should be found, who probably had never seen, and therefore would not believe, is surely no very extraordinary circumstance. Why should we not answer to objections, such as these, with the boldness of St. Jerome; and bid Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, and their followers, learn the illustrious characters of the men who founded, built up, and adorned the Christian church? Why should we not tell them, with Arnobius, of the orators, the grammarians, the rhetoricians, the lawyers, the physicians, the philosophers, "who appeared conscious of the alterations in the moral and physical government of the world;" and, from that consciousness, forsook the ordinary occupations of life and study, and attached themselves to the Christian discipline?†

I answer in the last place, that the miracles of Christians were falsely attributed to magic; and were for that reason thought unworthy the notice of the writers you have referred to. Suetonius, in his Life of Nero, calls the Christians, men of a new and magical superstition:‡ I am sensible that you laugh at those "sagacious commentators," who translate the original word by magical; and, adopting the idea of Mosheim, you think it ought to be rendered mischievous or pernicious: unquestionably it frequently has that meaning; with due deference, however, to Mosheim and yourself, I cannot help being of opinion, that in this place, as descriptive of the Christian religion, it is rightly translated magical. The Theodosian Code must be my excuse for dissenting from such respectable authority; and in it, I conjecture, you will find good reason for being of my opinion.§ Nor ought any friend to Christianity to be astonished or alarmed at Suetonius applying the word magical to the Christian religion; for the miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles principally consisted in alleviating the distresses, by curing the obstinate diseases of human kind; and the proper meaning of magic, as understood by the ancients, is a higher and more holy branch of the art of healing.|| The elder Pliny lost his life in an

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\* Discant Celsus, Porphyrius, Julianus, rabidi adversus Christum canes, discant eorum sectatores, qui putant Ecclesiam nullos Philosophos et eloquentes, nullos habuisse Doctores; quanti et quales viri eam fundaverint, extruxerint, ornaverintque; et desinant fidem nostram rusticæ tantum simplicitatis arguere, suamque potius imperitiam agnoscant.—Jero. Præ. Lib. de Illus. Eccl. Scrip.

† Arnob. con. Gen. lib. xi.

‡ Genui hominum superstitionis novæ et maleficæ. Suet. in Nero. c. xvi.

§ Chaldæi, ac *Magi*, et cæteri quos vulgus *maleficos* ob facinorum magnitudinem appellat.—Si quis *magus* vel magicis contaminibus adsuetus, qui *maleficus* vulgi consuetudine nuncupatur. ix. Cod. Theodos. tit. xvi.

|| Pliny, speaking of the origin of magic, says, Natam primum e medicina nemo dubitat, ac specie salutari irrepsisse velut *altiore sanctiorumque medicinam*. He afterwards says, that it was mixed with mathematical arts; and thus *magi* and *mathematici* are joined by Pliny, as *malefici* and *magici* are in the Theodosian Code. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib.

xxx. c. i.

eruption of Vesuvius, about forty-seven years after the death of Christ: some fifteen years before the death of Pliny, the Christians were persecuted at Rome for a crime, of which every person knew them innocent; but from the description, which Tacitus gives, of the low estimation they were held in at that time (for which, however, he assigns no cause; and therefore we may reasonably conjecture it was the same for which the Jews were everywhere become so odious, an opposition to polytheism), and of the extreme sufferings they underwent, we cannot be much surprised, that their name is not to be found in the works of Pliny or of Seneca: the sect itself must, by Nero's persecution, have been almost destroyed in Rome; and it would have been uncourtly, not to say unsafe, to have noticed an order of men, whose innocence an emperor had determined to traduce, in order to divert the dangerous, but deserved stream of popular censure from himself. Notwithstanding this, there is a passage in the Natural History of Pliny, which, how much soever it may have been overlooked, contains, I think, a very strong allusion to the Christians; and clearly intimates, he had heard of their miracles. In speaking concerning the origin of magic, he says; there is also another faction of magic, derived from the Jews, Moses, and Lotopea, and subsisting at present.\* The word faction does not ill denote the opinion the Romans entertained, of the religious associations of the Christians;† and a magical faction implies their pretensions, at least, to the miraculous gifts of healing; and its descending from Moses is according to the custom of the Romans, by which they confounded the Christians with the Jews; and its being then subsisting, seems to have a strong reference to the rumors Pliny had negligently heard reported of the Christians.

Submitting each of these answers to your cool and candid consideration, I proceed to take notice of another difficulty in your fifteenth chapter, which some have thought one of the most important in your whole book; the silence of profane historians concerning the preternatural darkness at the crucifixion of Christ. You know, Sir, that several learned men are of opinion, that profane history is not silent upon this subject; I will, however, put their authority for the present quite out of the question. I will neither trouble you with the testimony of Phlegon, nor with the appeal of Tertullian to the public registers of the Romans; but meeting you upon your own ground, and granting you every thing you desire, I will endeavor, from a fair and candid examination of the history of this event, to suggest a doubt, at least, to your mind, whether this was

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\* *Est et alia magices factio, a Mose etiamnum et Lotopea Judæis pendens.* Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. xxx. c. ii. Edit. Hardu. Dr. Lardner and others have made slight mention of this passage, probably from their reading in bad editions *Jamne* for *etiamnum*, a *Mose et Jamne et Jotape Judæis pendens.*

† Tertullian reckons the sect of the Christians, *inter licitas factiones.* Ap. c. xxxviii.



"the greatest phenomenon, to which the mortal eye has been witness, since the creation of the globe."

This darkness is mentioned by three of the four evangelists; St. Matthew thus expresses himself: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour;" St. Mark says: "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour;" St. Luke: "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened." The three evangelists agree, that there was darkness; and they agree in the extent of the darkness: for it is the same expression in the original, which our translators have rendered earth in Luke, and land in the two other accounts; and they agree in the duration of the darkness, it lasted three hours. Luke adds a particular circumstance, "that the sun was darkened." I do not know whether this event be anywhere else mentioned in Scripture, so that our inquiry can neither be extensive nor difficult.

In philosophical propriety of speech, darkness consists in the total absence of light, and admits of no degrees; however, in the more common acceptance of the word, there are degrees of darkness, as well as of light; and as the evangelists have said nothing, by which the particular degree of darkness can be determined, we have as much reason to suppose it was slight, as you have that it was excessive; but if it was slight, though it had extended itself over the surface of the whole globe, the difficulty of its not being recorded by Pliny or Seneca vanishes at once.\* Do you not perceive, Sir, upon what a slender foundation this mighty objection is grounded; when we have only to put you upon proving, that the darkness at the crucifixion was of so unusual a nature, as to have excited the particular attention of all mankind, or even of those who were witnesses to it? But I do not mean to deal so logically with you; rather give me leave to spare you the trouble of your proof, by proving, or showing the probability at least, of the direct contrary. There is a circumstance mentioned by St. John, which seems to indicate, that the darkness was not so excessive as is generally supposed; for it is probable, that, during the continuance of the darkness, Jesus spoke both to his mother, and to his beloved disciple, whom he saw from the cross; they were near the cross; but the soldiers which surrounded it must have kept them at too great a distance for Jesus to have seen them and known them, had the darkness at the crucifixion been excessive, like the preternatural darkness which God brought upon the land of Egypt; for it is expressly said, that, during

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\* The author of *L'Evangile de la Raison* is mistaken in saying, that the evangelists speak of a thick darkness; and that mistake has led him into another, into a disbelief of the event, because it has not been mentioned by the writers of the times: *Ces historiens (the Evangelists) ont le front de nous dire, qu'à sa mort la terre a été couverte d'épaisses ténèbres en plein midi et en pleine lune; comme si tous les écrivains de ce tems-là n'auroient pas remarqué un si étrange miracle! L'Evan. de la Rais. p. 99.*

the continuance of that darkness, "they saw not one another." The expression in St. Luke, "the sun was darkened," tends rather to confirm than to overthrow this reasoning. I am sensible this expression is generally thought equivalent to another; the sun was eclipsed; but the Bible is open to us all; and there can be no presumption in endeavoring to investigate the meaning of Scripture for ourselves. Luckily for the present argumentation, the very phrase of the sun's being darkened, occurs, in so many words, in one other place (and in only one) of the New Testament; and from that place you may possibly see reason to imagine, that the darkness might not, perhaps, have been so intense as to deserve the particular notice of the Roman naturalists: "And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun was darkened,\* and the air, by reason of the smoke of the pit." If we should say, that the sun at the crucifixion was obnubilated, and darkened by the intervention of clouds, as it is here represented to be by the intervention of a smoke like the smoke of a furnace, I do not see what you could object to our account; but such a phenomenon has surely no right to be esteemed the greatest that mortal eye has ever beheld. I may be mistaken in this interpretation; but I have no design to misrepresent the fact, in order to get rid of a difficulty; the darkness may have been as intense as many commentators have supposed it: but neither they nor you can prove it was so; and I am surely under no necessity, upon this occasion, of granting you, out of deference to any commentator, what you can neither prove nor render probable.

But you still, perhaps, may think, that the darkness, by its extent, made up for this deficiency in point of intenseness. The original word, expressive of its extent, is sometimes interpreted by the whole earth; more frequently, in the New Testament, of any little portion of the earth: for we read of the land of Judah, of the land of Israel, of the land of Zabulon, and of the land of Nephtholim; and it may very properly, I conceive, be translated in the place in question by region. But why should all the world take notice of a darkness which extended itself for a few miles about Jerusalem, and lasted but three hours? The Italians, especially, had no reason to remark the event as singular; since they were accustomed at that time, as they are at present, to see the neighboring regions so darkened for days together by the eruptions of *Ætna* and *Vesuvius*, that no man could know his neighbor.† We learn from the Scripture account, that an earthquake accompanied this darkness; and a dark clouded sky, I apprehend, very frequently precedes an earthquake;

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\* — και ἐσκοτίσθη ὁ ἥλιος. Αποκ. ix. 2.

† — nos autem tenebras cogitemus tantas, quantæ quondam eruptione *Etneorum* ignium finitimas regiones obscuravisse dicuntur, ut per biduum nemo hominem homo agnosceret. Cic. de Nat. Deo. lib. ii. And Pliny, in describing the eruption of *Vesuvius*, which suffocated his uncle, says: Dies alibi, illic nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque.

but its extent is not great, nor is its intenseness excessive, nor is the phenomenon itself so unusual, as not commonly to pass unnoticed in ages of science and history. I fear I may be liable to misrepresentation in this place; but I beg it may be observed, that however slight in degree, or however confined in extent the darkness at the crucifixion may have been; I am of opinion, that the power of God was as supernaturally exerted in its production and in that of the earthquake which accompanied it, as in the opening of the graves, and the resurrection of the saints, which followed the resurrection of Christ.

In another place, you seem not to believe "that Pontius Pilate informed the emperor of the unjust sentence of death, which he had pronounced against an innocent person." And the same reason which made him silent as to the death, ought, one would suppose, to have made him silent as to the miraculous events which accompanied it; and if Pilate, in his dispatches to the emperor, transmitted no account of the darkness (how great soever you suppose it to have been) which happened in a distant province; I cannot apprehend, that the report of it could have ever gained such credit at Rome as to induce either Pliny or Seneca to mention it as an authentic fact. I am, &c.

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## LETTER VI.

SIR;—I mean not to detain you long with my remarks upon your sixteenth chapter; for in a short *Apology* for Christianity, it cannot be expected that I should apologize at length for the indiscretions of the first Christians. Nor have I any disposition to reap a malicious pleasure from exaggerating, which you have had so much good-natured pleasure in extenuating, the truculent barbarity of their Roman persecutors.

M. de Voltaire has embraced every opportunity of contrasting the persecuting temper of the Christians with the mild tolerance of the ancient heathens; and I never read a page of his upon this subject without thinking Christianity materially, if not intentionally, obliged to him, for his endeavor to depress the lofty spirit of religious bigotry. I may with justice pay the same compliment to you; and I do it with sincerity; heartily wishing, that, in the prosecution of your work, you may render every species of intolerance universally detestable. There is no reason why you should abate the asperity of your invective; since no one can suspect you of a design to traduce Christianity under the guise of a zeal against persecution; or if any one should be so simple, he need but open the Gospel to be convinced, that such a scheme is too palpably absurd to have ever entered the head of any sensible and impartial man.

I wish, for the credit of human nature, that I could find reason to

agree with you in what you have said of the "universal toleration of Polytheism; of the mild indifference of antiquity; of the Roman princes beholding, without concern, a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway." But there are some passages in the Roman History which make me hesitate at least in this point, and almost induce me to believe, that the Romans were exceedingly jealous of all foreign religions, whether they were accompanied with immoral manners or not.

It was the Roman custom, indeed, to invite the tutelary gods of the nations, which they intended to subdue, to abandon their charge, and to promise them the same, or even a more august worship, in the city of Rome;\* and their triumphs were graced as much with the exhibition of their captive gods, as with the less humane one of their captive kings.† But this custom, though it filled the city with hundreds of gods of every country, denomination, and quality, cannot be brought as a proof of Roman toleration; it may indicate the excess of their vanity, the extent of their superstition, or the refinement of their policy; but it can never show, that the religion of individuals, when it differed from public wisdom, was either connived at as a matter of indifference, or tolerated as an inalienable right of human nature.

Upon another occasion, you, Sir, have referred to Livy as relating the introduction and suppression of the rites of Bacchus; and in that very place we find him confessing, that the prohibiting all foreign religions, and abolishing every mode of sacrifice which differed from the Roman mode, was a business frequently intrusted by their ancestors to the care of the proper magistrates; and he gives this reason for the procedure: that nothing could contribute more effectually to the ruin of religion, than the sacrificing after an external rite, and not after the manner instituted by their fathers.‡

Not thirty years before this event, the Prætor, in conformity to a decree of the senate, had issued an edict, that no one should presume to sacrifice in any public place after a new or foreign manner.§

\* In oppugnationibus, ante omnia solitum a Romanis sacerdotibus evocari deum cujus in tutela id oppidum esset; promittique illi eundem, aut ampliorem apud Romanos cultum. Plin. Nat. Hist. lib. xxxviii. c. iv.

† Roma triumphantis quotiens Ducis inclita currum

Plausibus exceptit, totiens altaria Divum

Addidit spoliis sibimet nova numina fecit.—PRUDEN.

‡ Quoties hoc patrum avorumque ætate negotium est magistratibus datum, ut sacra externa fieri vetarent? sacrificulos vatesque foro, circo, urbe prohiberent? *vaticinos libros conquirerent comburerentque?* omnem disciplinam sacrificandi, præterquam more Romano, abolerent? Judicabant enim prudentissimi viri omnis divini humanique juris, nihil æque dissolvendæ religionis esse, quam ubi non patrio, sed externo ritu sacrificaretur. Liv. lib. xxxix. c. xvi.

§ Ut quicumque *libros vaticinos precatationesve*, aut artem sacrificandi conscriptam haberet, eos libros omnes litterasque ad se ante Kalendas Apriles deferret; neu quis in publico sacrove loco, novo aut externo ritu sacrificaret. Liv. lib. xxv. c. i.

And in a still more early period, the ædiles had been commanded to take care that no gods were worshipped except the Roman gods; and that the Roman gods were worshipped after no manner but the established manner of the country.\*

But to come nearer to the times of which you are writing. In Dion Cassius you may meet with a great courtier, one of the interior cabinet, and a polished statesman, in a set speech upon the most momentous subject, expressing himself to the emperor in a manner agreeable enough to the practice of antiquity, but utterly inconsistent with the most remote idea of religious toleration. The speech alluded to, contains, I confess it, nothing more than the advice of an individual; but it ought to be remembered, that that individual was Mæcenas, that the advice was given to Augustus, and that the occasion of giving it was no less important than the settling the form of the Roman government. He recommends it to Cæsar to worship the gods himself according to the established form, and to *force* all others to do the same, and to *hate* and to *punish* all those who should attempt to introduce foreign religions:† nay, he bids him, in the same place, have an eye upon the philosophers also; so that free thinking, free speaking at least, upon religious matters, was not quite so safe under the gentle sway of the Roman princes, as, thank God, it is under the much more gentle government of our own.

In the Edict of Toleration published by Galerius after six years' unremitted persecution of the Christians, we perceive his motive for persecution to have been the same with that which had influenced the conduct of the more ancient Romans, an abhorrence of all innovations in religion. You have favored us with the translation of this edict, in which he says, "we were particularly desirous of reclaiming into the way of reason and nature," *ad bonas mentes* (a good pretence this for a polytheistic persecutor) "the deluded Christians, who had renounced the religion and ceremonies instituted by their fathers;" this is the precise language of Livy, describing a persecution of a foreign religion three hundred years before, "*turba erat nec sacrificantium nec precantium deos patrio more.*" And the very expedient of forcing the Christians to deliver up their religious books, which was practised in this persecution, and which Mosheim attributes to the advice of Hierocles, and you to that of the philosophers of those times, seems clear to me, from the places in Livy before quoted, to have been nothing but an old piece of state policy, to which the Romans had recourse as often as they apprehended their established religion to be in any danger.

In the preamble of the letter of toleration, which the emperor

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\* Datum inde negotium ædilibus, ut animadverterent, ne qui, nisi Romani dii, neu quo alio more quam patrio, colerentur, Liv. l. iv. c. xxx.

† Ταυτα τε ητω πραττε, και προσετι το μεν θειον παντη παντως αυτος τε σεβη, κατα τα πατρια, και της αλλης τιμαν αναγκαζε της δε δη ξενιζοντας τι περι αυτο και μισει και κολαζε. Dion. Cas. lib. lii.

Maximin reluctantly wrote to Sabinus about a year after the publication of Galerius's Edict, there is a plain avowal of the reasons which induced Galerius and Diocletian to commence their persecution; they had seen the temples of the gods forsaken, and were determined by the severity of punishment to reclaim men to their worship.\*

In short, the system recommended by Mæcenas, of forcing every person to be of the emperor's religion, and of hating and punishing every innovator, contained no new doctrine; it was correspondent to the practice of the Roman senate, in the most illustrious times of the republic, and seems to have been generally adopted by the emperors in their treatment of Christians, whilst they themselves were Pagans; and in their treatment of Pagans, after they themselves became Christians; and if any one should be willing to derive those laws against heretics (which are so abhorrent from the mild spirit of the Gospel, and so reproachful to the Roman code) from the blind adherence of the Christian emperors to the intolerant policy of their Pagan predecessors, something, I think, might be produced in support of his conjecture.

But I am sorry to have said so much upon such a subject. In endeavoring to palliate the severity of the Romans towards the Christians, you have remarked, "it was in vain that the oppressed believer asserted the inalienable rights of conscience and private judgment." "Though his situation might excite the pity, his arguments could never reach the understanding, either of the philosophic, or of the believing part of the Pagan world." How is this, Sir? are the arguments for liberty of conscience so exceedingly inconclusive, that you think them incapable of reaching the understanding, even of philosophers? A captious adversary would embrace with avidity the opportunity this passage affords him, of blotting your character with the odious stain of being a persecutor; a stain which no learning can wipe out, which no genius or ability can render amiable. I am far from entertaining such an opinion of your principles; but this conclusion seems fairly deducible from what you have said, that the minds of the Pagans were so pre-occupied with the notions of forcing, and hating, and punishing those who differed from them in religion, that arguments for the inalienable rights of conscience, which would have convinced yourself, and every philosopher in Europe, and staggered the resolution of an inquisitor, were incapable of reaching their understandings, or making any impression on their hearts; and you might, perhaps, have spared yourself some perplexity in the investigation of the motives which induced the Roman emperors to persecute, and the Roman people to hate the Christians, if you had not overlooked the

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† Συνειδὸν σχεδὸν ἀπαντὰς ἀνθρώπους, καταλειφθείσης τῆς τῶν θεῶν θρησκείας, τῷ ἔθνει τῶν Χριστιανῶν αὐτοὺς συμμιχότας. Ὁρθῶς διατεταχέναι πάντας ἀνθρώπους τρε ἀπο τῶν θεῶν τῶν ἀθανάτων ἀναχωρησάντας, προ δηλῶ κολάσει καὶ τιμωρία εἰς τὴν θρησκείαν τῶν θεῶν ἀνακληθῆναι. Euseb. lib. ix. c. iv.

true one, and adopted with too great facility the erroneous idea of the extreme tolerance of Pagan Rome.

The Christians, you observe, were accused of atheism: and it must be owned that they were the greatest of all atheists, in the opinion of the polytheists; for, instead of Hesiod's thirty thousand gods, they could not be brought to acknowledge above one; and even that one they refused, at the hazard of their lives, to blaspheme with the appellation of Jupiter. But is it not somewhat singular, that the pretensions of the Christians to a constant intercourse with superior beings, in the working of miracles, should have been a principal cause of converting to their faith those who branded them with the imputation of atheism?

They were accused, too, of forming dangerous conspiracies against the state: this accusation, you own, was as unjust as the preceding: but there seems to have been a peculiar hardship in the situation of the Christians, since the very same men, who thought them dangerous to the state, on account of their conspiracies, condemned them, as you have observed, for not interfering in its concerns; for their criminal disregard to the business of war and government, and for their entertaining doctrines, which were supposed "to prohibit them from assuming the character of soldiers, of magistrates, and of princes:" men, such as these, would have made but poor conspirators.

They were accused, lastly, of the most horrid crimes. This accusation, it is confessed, was mere calumny; yet as calumny is generally more extensive in its influence than truth, perhaps this calumny might be more powerful in stopping the progress of Christianity, than the virtues of the Christians were in promoting it; and, in truth, Origen observes, that the Christians, on account of the crimes which were maliciously laid to their charge, were held in such abhorrence, that no one would so much as speak to them. It may be worth while to remark from him, that the Jews, in the very beginning of Christianity, were the authors of all those calumnies, which Celsus afterwards took such great delight in urging against the Christians, and which you have mentioned with such great precision.\*

It is no improbable supposition, that the clandestine manner in which the persecuting spirit of the Jews and Gentiles obliged the Christians to celebrate their eucharist, together with the expressions of eating the body, and drinking the blood of Christ, which were used in its institution, and the custom of imparting a kiss of charity

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\* Videtur mihi fecisse idem Celsus, quod Judæi, qui sub Christianismi initium errorem sparsere, quasi ejus sectæ homines mactati pueri vescerentur carnibus; et quod, quoties eis libeat operam dare occultis libidinibus, extincto lumine constupret, quam quisque nactus fuerit. Quæ falsa et iniqua opinio dudum valde multos a religione nostra alienos tenuit; persuasos, quod tales sint Christiani; et ad hoc temporis nonnullos fallit, qui ea de causa Christianos adversantur, ut nec simplex colloquium cum eis habere velint.—Orig. con. Cels. lib. vi.

to each other, and of calling each other by the appellations of brother and sister,\* gave occasions to their enemies to invent, and induced careless observers to believe, all the odious things which were said against the Christians.

You have displayed at length, in expressive diction, the accusations of the enemies of Christianity; and you have told us of the imprudent defence by which the Christians vindicated the purity of their morals; and you have huddled up in a short note (which many a reader will never see) the testimony of Pliny to their innocence. Permit me to do the Christians a little justice, by producing in their cause the whole truth.

Between seventy and eighty years after the death of Christ, Pliny had occasion to consult the emperor Trajan concerning the manner in which he should treat the Christians; it seems as if there had been judicial proceedings against them, though Pliny had never happened to attend any of them. He knew, indeed, that men were to be punished for being Christians, or he would not, as a sensible magistrate, have received the accusations of legal, much less of illegal, anonymous informers against them; nor would he, before he wrote to the emperor, have put to death those whom his threats could not hinder from persevering in their confession, that they were Christians. His harsh manner of proceeding "in an office the most repugnant to his humanity," had made many apostatize from their profession: persons of this complexion were well fitted to inform him of every thing they knew concerning the Christians; accordingly he examined them; but not one of them accused the Christians of any other crime than of praying to Christ, as to some God, and of binding themselves by an oath, not to be guilty of any wickedness. Not contented with this information, he put two maid servants, which were called ministers, to the torture, but even the rack could not extort from the imbecility of the sex a confession of any crime, any account different from that which the apostates had voluntarily given; not a word do we find of their feasting upon murdered infants, or of their mixing in incestuous commerce. After all his pains, Pliny pronounced the meal of the Christians to be promiscuous and innocent: persons of both sexes, of all ages, and of every condition, assembled promiscuously together: there was nothing for chastity to blush at, or for humanity to shudder at, in these meetings; there was no secret initiation of proselytes by abhorred rites: but they eat a promiscuous meal in Christian charity, and with the most perfect innocence.†

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\* The Romans used these expressions in so impure a sense, that Martial calls them *Nomina nequiora*.—Lib. ii. epig. iv.

† —affirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suæ, vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire; carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem: seque sacramento non in *seculum* aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent: quibus peractis, morem sibi discedendi fuisse, rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, *promiscuum* tamen, et *innocuum*. Plin. Epis. xcvii. lib. x.



Whatever faults then the Christians may have been guilty of in after times ; though you could produce to us a thousand ambitious prelates of Carthage, or sensual ones of Antioch, and blot ten thousand pages with the impurities of the Christian clergy ; yet at this period, whilst the memory of Christ and his apostles was fresh in their minds ; or, in the more emphatic language of Jerome, " whilst the blood of our Lord was warm, and recent faith was fervent in the believers ;" we have the greatest reason to conclude, that they were eminently distinguished for the probity and the purity of their lives. Had there been but a shadow of a crime in their assemblies, it must have been detected by the industrious search of the intelligent Pliny ; and it is a matter of real surprise, that no one of the apostates thought of paying court to the governor by a false testimony ; especially, as the apostasy seems to have been exceeding general : since the temples, which had been almost deserted, began again to be frequented ; and the victims, for which, a little time before, scarce a purchaser was to be found, began again everywhere to be bought up. This, Sir, is a valuable testimony in our favor ; it is not that of a declaiming apologist, of a deluding priest, or of a deluded martyr, of an orthodox bishop, or of any " of the most pious of men," the Christians ; but it is that of a Roman magistrate, philosopher, and lawyer ; who cannot be supposed to have wanted inclination to detect the immoralities or the conspiracies of the Christians ; since, in his treatment of them, he had stretched the authority of his office, and violated alike the laws of his country and of humanity.

With this testimony I will conclude my remarks : for I have no disposition to blacken the character you have given of Nero ; or to lessen the humanity of the Roman magistrates ; or to magnify the number of Christians, or of martyrs ; or to undertake the defence of a few fanatics, who by their injudicious zeal brought ruin upon themselves, and disgrace upon their profession. I may not probably have convinced you that you are wrong in any thing which you have advanced ; or that the authors you have quoted will not support you in the inferences you have drawn from their works ; or that Christianity ought to be distinguished from its corruptions : yet I may perhaps have had the good fortune to lessen, in the minds of others, some of that dislike to the Christian religion, which the perusal of your book had unhappily excited. I have touched but upon general topics ; for I should have wearied out your patience, to say nothing of my readers', or my own, had I enlarged upon every thing in which I dissent from you ; and a minute examination of your work would, moreover, have had the appearance of a captious disposition to descend into illiberal personalities ; and might have produced a certain acrimony of sentiment or expression, which may be serviceable in supplying the place of argument, or adding a zest to a dull composition ; but has nothing to do with the investigation of truth. Sorry shall I be, if what I have written should give the least interruption to the prosecution of the great work in which you are engaged : the world is now possessed

of the opinion of us both upon the subject in question ; and it may, perhaps, be proper for us both to leave it in this state. I say not this from any backwardness to acknowledge my mistakes, when I am convinced that I am in an error, but to express the almost insuperable reluctance which I feel to the bandying abusive argument in public controversy ; it is not, in good truth, a difficult task to chastise the froward petulance of those who mistake personal invective for reasoning, and clumsy banter for ingenuity ; but it is a dirty business at best, and should never be undertaken by a man of any temper, except when the interests of truth may suffer by his neglect. Nothing of this nature, I am sensible, is to be expected from you ; and if any thing of the kind has happened to escape myself, I hereby disclaim the intention of saying it, and heartily wish it unsaid.

Will you permit me, Sir, through this channel (I may not, perhaps, have another so good an opportunity of doing it), to address a few words, not to yourself, but to a set of men who disturb all serious company with their profane declamation against Christianity ; and who, having picked up in their travels, or the writings of the Deists, a few flimsy objections, infect with their ignorant and irreverent ridicule the ingenuous minds of the rising generation ?

GENTLEMEN,—Suppose the mighty work accomplished, the cross trampled upon, Christianity everywhere proscribed, and the religion of nature once more become the religion of Europe ; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves, from the exchange ? I know your answer, you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of priests, and the tyranny of superstition. No ; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odin, and Mango-Copac, and all the great legislators of ancient and modern story, have been of opinion, that the affairs of civil society could not well be conducted without *some* religion ; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with probably as much hypocrisy ; a religion with assuredly more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But I will tell you from what you will have freed the world ; you will have freed it from its abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue ; you will, with the religion, have brought back the depraved morality of Paganism ; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life, and thereby you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those mild and silent virtues, which (however despicable they may appear in your eyes) are the only ones which meliorate and sublime our nature ; which Paganism never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all their should happen to be one, must (unless a miracle be exerted in the alteration of our disposition) be more vicious and more miserable than this is.

Perhaps you will contend, that the universal light of reason, that

the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves sufficient to exalt the nature, and regulate the manners of mankind. Shall we never have done with this groundless commendation of natural law? Look into the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of its influence over the Gentiles of those days; or if you dislike Paul's authority, and the manners of antiquity, look into the more admired accounts of modern voyagers; and examine its influence over the Pagans of our own times, over the sensual inhabitants of Otaheite, over the cannibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless savages of America. But these men are barbarians. Your law of nature, notwithstanding, extends even to them. But they have misused their reason: they have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for that revelation, which you, with an ignorant and fastidious self-sufficiency, deem useless. But they might of themselves, if they thought fit, become wise and virtuous. I answer with Cicero, "Ut nihil interest, utrum nemo valeat, an nemo valere possit; sic non intelligo quid intersit, utrum nemo sit sapiens, an nemo esse possit."

These, however, you will think, are extraordinary instances; and that we ought not from these to take our measure of the excellency of the law of nature, but rather from the civilized states of China and Japan, or from the nations which flourished in learning and in arts, before Christianity was heard of in the world. You mean to say, that by the law of nature, which you are desirous of substituting in the room of the Gospel, you do not understand those rules of conduct, which an individual, abstracted from the community, and deprived of the institution of mankind, could excogitate for himself; but such a system of precepts as the most enlightened men of the most enlightened ages have recommended to our observance. Where do you find this system? We cannot meet with it in the works of Stobæus, or the Scythian Anacharsis; nor in those of Plato, or of Cicero; nor in those of the Emperor Antoninus, or the slave Epictetus; for we are persuaded, that the most animated considerations of the *πρεπον*, and the *honestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the fitness of things, are not able to furnish, even a Brutus himself, with permanent principles of action; much less are they able to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart, to curb the irregularity of appetite, or restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you order us to examine the works of Grotius, or Puffendorff, or Burlamaqui, or Hutchinson, for what you understand by the law of nature; we apprehend that you are in a great error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discoverable by natural reason, from the elegant systems of it, which have been drawn up by Christian philosophers; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation; a thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God: and even those amongst yourselves, who, rejecting Christianity, still continue theists, are indebted to revelation (whether you are either aware of, or disposed to acknowledge the debt, or not) for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity, which you have fondly attributed

to the excellency of your own unassisted reason. If you would know the real genius of natural law, and how far it can proceed in the investigation or enforcement of moral duties; you must consult the manners and the writings of those, who have never heard of either the Jewish or the Christian dispensation, or of those other manifestations of himself, which God vouchsafed to Adam and to the patriarchs before and after the flood. It would be difficult perhaps anywhere, to find a people entirely destitute of traditionary notices concerning the Deity, and of traditionary fears or expectations of another life; and the morals of mankind may have, perhaps, been nowhere quite so abandoned as they would have been, had they been left wholly to themselves in these points: however, it is a truth which cannot be denied, how much soever it may be lamented, that though the generality of mankind have always had some faint conceptions of God and his providence; yet they have been always greatly inefficacious in the production of good morality, and highly derogatory to his nature, amongst all the people of the earth, except the Jews and Christians; and some may perhaps be desirous of excepting the Mahometans, who derive all that is good in their *Koran* from Christianity.

The laws concerning justice, and the reparation of damages, concerning the security of property, and the performance of contracts; concerning, in short, whatever affects the well-being of civil society, have been everywhere understood with sufficient precision; and if you choose to style Justinian's code, a code of natural law, though you will err against propriety of speech, yet you are so far in the right, that natural reason discovered, and the depravity of human nature compelled human kind to establish by proper sanctions the laws therein contained; and you will have, moreover, Carneades, no mean philosopher, on your side; who knew of no law of nature different from that which men had instituted for their common utility, and which was various according to the manners of men in different climates, and changeable with a change of times in the same. And, in truth, in all countries where Paganism has been the established religion, though a philosopher may now and then have stepped beyond the paltry prescript of civil jurisprudence in his pursuit of virtue; yet the bulk of mankind have ever been contented with that scanty pittance of morality, which enabled them to escape the lash of civil punishment: I call it a scanty pittance, because a man may be intemperate, iniquitous, impious, a thousand ways a profligate and a villain, and yet elude the cognizance, and avoid the punishment of civil laws.

I am sensible, you will be ready to say, what is all this to the purpose? Though the bulk of mankind may never be able to investigate the laws of natural religion, nor disposed to reverence their sanctions when investigated by others, nor solicitous about any other standard of moral rectitude than civil legislation; yet the inconveniences which may attend the extirpation of Christianity can be no proof of its truth: I have not produced them as a proof of its truth; but they are a strong and conclusive proof, if not of its truth,

at least of its utility; and the consideration of its utility may be a motive to yourselves for examining, whether it may not chance to be true; and it ought to be a reason with every good citizen, and with every man of sound judgment, to keep his opinions to himself, if, from any particular circumstances in his studies or in his education, he should have the misfortune to think that it is not true. If you can discover to the rising generation a better religion than the Christian, one that will more effectually animate their hopes, and subdue their passions, make them better men or better members of society, we importune you to publish it for their advantage; but till you can do that, we beg of you not to give the reins to their passions, by instilling into their unsuspicious minds your pernicious prejudices. Even now, men scruple not, by their lawless lust, to ruin the repose of private families; and to fix a stain of infamy upon the noblest: even now, they hesitate not in lifting up a murderous arm against the life of their friend, or against their own, as often as the fever of intemperance stimulates their resentment, or the satiety of a useless life excites their despondency: even now, whilst we are persuaded of a resurrection from the dead, and of a *judgment to come*, we find it difficult enough to resist the solicitations of sense, and to escape unspotted from the licentious manners of the world: but what will become of our virtue, what of the consequent peace and happiness of society, if you persuade us that there are no such things? In two words, you may ruin yourselves by your attempt, and you will certainly ruin your country by your success.

But the consideration of the inutility of your design is not the only one, which should induce you to abandon it; the argument *a tuto* ought to be warily managed, or it may tend to the silencing our opposition to any system of superstition, which has had the good fortune to be sanctified by public authority: it is, indeed, liable to no objection in the present case; we do not, however, wholly rely upon its cogency. It is not contended, that Christianity is to be received merely because it is useful, but because it is true. This you deny, and think your objections well grounded: we conceive them originating in your vanity, your immorality, or your misapprehension. There are many worthless doctrines, many superstitious observances, which the fraud or folly of mankind have everywhere annexed to Christianity (especially in the church of Rome), as essential parts of it: if you take these sorry appendages to Christianity for Christianity itself, as preached by Christ, and by the apostles; if you confound the Roman with the Christian religion, you quite misapprehend its nature, and are in a state similar to that of men mentioned by Plutarch, in his Treatise of Superstition; who, flying from superstition, leapt over religion, and sunk into downright atheism.\*

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\* Le Papisme (says Helvetius in a posthumous work) n'est aux yeux d'un homme sensé qu'une pure idolatrie—nous sommes étonnés de l'absurdité de la religion païenne. Celle de la religion Papiste étonnera bien d'avantage un jour la posterité.—We trust, that day is not at a great distance, and deism will then be buried in the ruins of the church of

Christianity is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform its precepts to the standard of fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations; but calls keeping, whoredom; intrigue, adultery; and duelling, murder: it will not pander to lust, it will not license the intemperance of mankind; it is a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure; and your way of life may have made you quarrel with your religion. As to your vanity, as a cause of your infidelity, suffer me to produce the sentiments of M. Bayle upon that head: if the description does not suit your character, you will not be offended at it; and if you are offended with its freedom, it will do you good. "This inclines me to believe, that libertines, like Des-Barreaux, are not greatly persuaded of the truth of what they say. They have made no deep examination; they have learned some few objections, which they are perpetually making a noise with; they speak from a principle of ostentation, and give themselves the lie in the time of danger. Vanity has a greater share in their disputes than conscience; they imagine that the singularity and boldness of the opinions, which they maintain, will give them the reputation of men of parts: by degrees, they get a habit of holding impious discourses; and if their vanity be accompanied by a voluptuous life, their progress in that road is the swifter.\*

The main stress of your objections rests not upon the insufficiency of the external evidence to the truth of Christianity; for few of you, though you may become the future ornaments of the senate, or of the bar, have ever employed an hour in its examination; but upon the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament; they exceed, you say, your comprehension; and you felicitate yourselves, that you are not yet arrived at the true standard of orthodox faith—*credo quia impossibile*. You think it would be taking a superfluous trouble, to inquire into the nature of the external proofs by which Christianity is established; since, in your opinion, the book itself carries with it its own refutation. A gentleman as acute, probably, as any of you, and who once believed, perhaps, as little as any of you, has drawn a quite different conclusion from the perusal of the New Testament: his book (however exceptionable it may be thought in some particular parts) exhibits, not only a distinguished triumph of reason over prejudice, of Christianity over deism; but it exhibits, what is infinitely more rare, the character of a man, who has had courage and candor enough to acknowledge it.†

But what if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion; some circumstances, which in their causes, or their consequences, surpass the reach of human reason; are they to be rejected upon that account? You are, or would be thought,

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Rome; for the taking the superstition, the avarice, the ambition, the intolerance of Antichristianism for Christianity, has been the great error upon which infidelity has built its system, both at home and abroad.

\* Bayle, Hist. Dict. Art. Des-Barreaux.

† See a view of the Internal Evidence, &c. by Soame Jenyns.

men of reading, and knowledge, and enlarged understandings; weigh the matter fairly; and consider whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same footing with every other object of your contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though you get over its first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness; yet you will find yourself at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines which can never meet; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinites, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any finite quantity, but than each other. In physics, you cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing; not of the light, by which you see; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which you hear; nor of the fire, by which you are warmed. In physiology, you cannot tell what first gave motion to the heart; nor what continues it; nor why its motion is less voluntary than that of the lungs; nor why you are able to move your arm to the right or left, by a simple volition: you cannot explain the cause of animal heat; nor comprehend the principle by which your body was at first formed, nor by which it is sustained, nor by which it will be reduced to earth. In natural religion, you cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity; nor easily understand how his prescience can be consistent with your freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect; nor why he did not create them sooner; in short, you cannot look into any branch of knowledge, but you will meet with subjects above your comprehension. The fall and the redemption of human kind are not more incomprehensible than the creation and the conservation of the universe; the infinite Author of the works of providence, and of nature, is equally inscrutable; equally past our finding out in them both. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest inquirers into nature have ever thought with most reverence, and spoken with most diffidence, concerning those things, which, in revealed religion, may seem hard to be understood: they have ever avoided that self-sufficiency of knowledge, which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton's by an hypothesis of his own, still less defensible than that which he opposes:—"Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits-forts, qui critique les vérités de notre religion, et s'en moquent même avec la plus impertinente suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels! combien et combien des choses sur lesquelles vous raisonnez si légèrement, sont elles plus sublimes, et plus élevés, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'égare si grossièrement!"\*

Plato mentions a set of men, who were very ignorant, and thought themselves supremely wise; and who rejected the arguments for

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\* Euler.

the being of a God, derived from the harmony and order of the universe, as old and trite.\* There have been men, it seems, in all ages, who, in affecting singularity, have overlooked truth: an argument, however, is not the worse for being old; and surely it would have been a more just mode of reasoning if you had examined the external evidence for the truth of Christianity, weighed the old arguments from miracles, and from prophecies, before you had rejected the whole account from the difficulties you met with in it. You would laugh at an Indian, who in peeping into a history of England, and meeting with the mention of the Thames being frozen, or of a shower of hail, or of snow, should throw the book aside as unworthy of his farther notice, from his want of ability to comprehend these phenomena.

In considering the argument from miracles, you will soon be convinced, that it is possible for God to work miracles; and you will be convinced, that it is as possible for human testimony to establish the truth of miraculous, as of physical or historical events: but before you can be convinced that the miracles in question are supported by such testimony as deserves to be credited, you must inquire at what period, and by what persons, the books of the Old and New Testament were composed. If you reject the account, without making this examination, you reject it from prejudice, not from reason.

There is, however, a short method of examining this argument, which may, perhaps, make as great an impression on your minds as any other. Three men of distinguished abilities rose up at different times, and attacked Christianity, with every objection which their malice could suggest, or their learning could devise: but neither Celsus in the second century, nor Porphyry in the third, nor the emperor Julian himself in the fourth century, ever questioned the reality of the miracles related in the Gospels. Do but you grant us what these men (who were more likely to know the truth of the matter than you can be) granted to their adversaries, and we will very readily let you make the most of the magic, to which, as the last wretched shift, they were forced to attribute them. We can find you men, in our days, who, from the mixture of two colorless liquors, will produce you a third as red as blood, or of any other color you desire; *et dicto citius*, by a drop resembling water, will restore the transparency; they will make two fluids coalesce into a solid body; and, from the mixture of liquors colder than ice, will instantly raise you a horrid explosion and a tremendous flame: these, and twenty other tricks they will perform, without having been sent with our Saviour to Egypt to learn magic; nay, with a bottle or two of oil they will compose the undulations of a lake; and, by a little art, they will restore the functions of life to a man who has been an hour or two under water, or a day or two buried in the snow: but in vain will these men, or the greatest magicians that Egypt ever saw, say to a boisterous sea, Peace, be

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\* De Leg. lib. x.



still; in vain will they say to a carcass rotting in the grave, Come forth: the winds and the sea will not obey them, and the putrid carcass will not hear them. You need not suffer yourselves to be deprived of the weight of this argument, from its having been observed, that the fathers have acknowledged the supernatural part of Paganism, since the fathers were in no condition to detect a cheat, which was supported both by the disposition of the people, and the power of the civil magistrate;\* and they were from that inability forced to attribute to infernal agency what was too cunningly contrived to be detected, and contrived for too impious a purpose to be credited as the work of God.

With respect to prophecy, you may, perhaps, have accustomed yourselves to consider it as originating in Asiatic enthusiasm, in Chaldean mystery, or in the subtle stratagem of interested priests, and have given yourselves no more trouble concerning the predictions of sacred, than concerning the oracles of Pagan history. Or if you have ever cast a glance upon this subject, the dissensions of learned men concerning the proper interpretation of the Revelation, and other difficult prophecies, may have made you rashly conclude, that all prophecies were equally unintelligible, and more indebted for their accomplishment to a fortunate concurrence of events, and the pliant ingenuity of the expositor, than to the inspired foresight of the prophet. In all that the prophets of the Old Testament have delivered concerning the destruction of particular cities, and the desolation of particular kingdoms, you may see nothing but shrewd conjectures, which any one acquainted with the history of the rise and fall of empires might certainly have made: and as you would not hold him for a prophet, who should now affirm that London or Paris would afford to future ages a spectacle just as melancholy as that which we now contemplate, with a sigh, in the ruins of Agrigentum or Palmyra; so you cannot persuade yourselves to believe, that the denunciations of the prophets against the haughty cities of Tyre or Babylon, for instance, proceeded from the inspiration of the Deity. There is no doubt, that by some such general kind of reasoning many are influenced to pay no attention to an argument, which, if properly considered, carries with it the strongest conviction.

Spinoza said, that he would have broken his atheistic system to pieces, and embraced without repugnance the ordinary faith of Christians, if he could have persuaded himself of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead; and I question not, that there are many disbelievers, who would relinquish their deistic tenets, and receive the Gospel, if they could persuade themselves, that God had ever so far interfered in the moral government of the world as to illumine the mind of any one man with the knowledge of future events. A miracle strikes the senses of the persons who see it; a prophecy addresses itself to the understandings of those who behold its completion; and it requires, in many cases, some learning,

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\* See Lord Lyttelton's Observations on St. Paul.

in all some attention, to judge of the correspondence of events with the predictions concerning them. No one can be convinced, that what Jeremiah and the other prophets foretold of the fate of Babylon, that it should be besieged by the Medes; that it should be taken, when her mighty men were drunken, when her springs were dried up; and that it should become a pool of water, and should remain desolate for ever; no one, I say, can be convinced, that all these, and other parts of the prophetic denunciation, have been minutely fulfilled, without spending some time in reading the accounts which profane historians have delivered down to us concerning its being taken by Cyrus; and which modern travellers have given us of its present situation.

Porphyry was so persuaded of the coincidence between the prophecies of Daniel and the events, that he was forced to affirm, the prophecies were written after the things prophesied of had happened. Another Porphyry has, in our days, been so astonished at the correspondence between the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as related by St. Matthew, and the history of that event, as recorded by Josephus; that, rather than embrace Christianity, he has ventured (contrary to the faith of all ecclesiastical history, the opinion of the learned of all ages, and all the rules of good criticism) to assert, that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel after Jerusalem had been taken and destroyed by the Romans. You may from these instances perceive the strength of the argument from prophecy; it has not been able indeed to vanquish the prejudices of either the ancient or the modern Porphyry; but it has been able to compel them both to be guilty of obvious falsehoods, which have nothing but impudent assertions to support them.

Some over-zealous interpreters of Scripture have found prophecies in simple narrations, extended real predictions beyond the times and circumstances to which they naturally were applied, and perplexed their readers with a thousand quaint allusions and allegorical conceits: this proceeding has made men of sense pay less regard to prophecy in general. There are some predictions, however, such as those concerning the present state of the Jewish people, and the corruptions of Christianity, which are now fulfilling in the world; and which, if you will take the trouble to examine them, you will find of such an extraordinary nature, that you will not perhaps hesitate to refer them to God as their author; and if you once become persuaded of the truth of any one miracle, or of the completion of any one prophecy, you will resolve all your difficulties (concerning the manner of God's interposition in the moral government of our species, and the nature of the doctrines contained in revelation) into your own inability fully to comprehend the whole scheme of divine Providence.

We are told, however, that the strangeness of the narration, and the difficulty of the doctrines contained in the New Testament, are not the only circumstances which induce you to reject it; you have discovered, you think, so many contradictions in the accounts which the Evangelists have given of the life of Christ, that you are com-

pelled to consider the whole as an ill-digested and improbable story. You would not reason thus upon any other occasion; you would not reject as fabulous the accounts given by Livy and Polybius of Hannibal and the Carthaginians, though you should discover a difference betwixt them in several points of little importance. You cannot compare the history of the same events, as delivered by any two historians, but you will meet with many circumstances, which, though mentioned by one, are either wholly omitted, or differently related by the other; and this observation is peculiarly applicable to biographical writings: but no one ever thought of disbelieving the leading circumstances of the lives of Vitellius or Vespasian, because Tacitus and Suetonius did not in every thing correspond in their accounts of these emperors. And if the memoirs of the life and doctrines of M. de Voltaire himself were, some twenty or thirty years after his death, to be delivered to the world by four of his most intimate acquaintance, I do not apprehend that we should discredit the whole account of such an extraordinary man, by reason of some slight inconsistencies and contradictions, which the avowed enemies of his name might chance to discover in the several narrations. Though we should grant you, then, that the evangelists had fallen into some trivial contradictions, in what they have related concerning the life of Christ; yet you ought not to draw any other inference from our concession than that they had not plotted together, as cheats would have done, in order to give an unexceptionable consistency to their fraud. We are not however disposed to make you any such concession; we will rather show you the futility of your general argument, by touching upon a few of the places which you think are most liable to your censure.

You observe, that neither Luke, nor Mark, nor John have mentioned the cruelty of Herod in murdering the infants of Bethlehem; and that no account is to be found of this matter in Josephus, who wrote the life of Herod; and therefore the fact recorded by Matthew is not true. The concurrent testimony of many independent writers concerning a matter of fact unquestionably adds to its probability; but if nothing is to be received as true, upon the testimony of a single author, we must give up some of the best writers, and disbelieve some of the most interesting facts of ancient history.

According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there was only an interval of three months, you say, between the baptism and crucifixion of Jesus; from which time, taking away the forty days of the temptation, there will only remain about six weeks for the whole period of his public ministry; which lasted, however, according to St. John, at the least above three years. Your objection fairly stated, stands thus: Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in writing the history of Jesus Christ, mention the several events of his life, as following one another in continued succession, without taking notice of the times in which they happened: but is it a just conclusion from their silence to infer, that there really were no intervals of time between the transactions which they seem to have connected? Many instances might be produced, from the most admired biographers of antiquity,

in which events are related as immediately consequent to each other, which did not happen but at very distant periods: we have an obvious example of this manner of writing in St. Matthew; who connects the preaching of John the Baptist with the return of Joseph from Egypt, though we are certain that the latter event preceded the former by a great many years.

John has said nothing of the institution of the Lord's supper; the other evangelists have said nothing of the washing of the disciples' feet. What then? are you not ashamed to produce these facts as instances of contradiction? If omissions are contradictions, look into the history of the age of Louis XIV., or into the general history of M. de Voltaire, and you will meet with a great abundance of contradictions.

John, in mentioning the discourses which Jesus had with his mother and his beloved disciple, at the time of his crucifixion, says, that she, with Mary Magdalene, stood near the cross. Matthew, on the other hand, says, that Mary Magdalene and the other women were there, beholding afar off. This you think a manifest contradiction; and scoffingly inquire, whether the women and the beloved disciple, which were near the cross, could be the same with those who stood far from the cross? It is difficult not to transgress the bounds of moderation and good manners, in answering such sophistry. What! have you to learn, that though the evangelists speak of the crucifixion as of one event, it was not accomplished in one instant, but lasted several hours? And why the women, who were at a distance from the cross, might not, during its continuance, draw near the cross; or, from being near the cross, might not move from the cross, is more than you can explain to either us or yourselves. And we take from you your only refuge, by denying expressly, that the different evangelists, in their mention of the women, speak of the same point of time.

The evangelists, you affirm, are fallen into gross contradictions, in their accounts of the appearances by which Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, after his resurrection from the dead; for Matthew speaks of two, Mark of three, Luke of two, and John of four. That contradictory propositions cannot be true is readily granted; and if you will produce the place in which Matthew says, that Jesus Christ appeared twice, and *no oftener*, it will be further granted, that he is contradicted by John in a very material part of his narration; but till you do that, you must excuse me, if I cannot grant, that the evangelists have contradicted each other in this point; for to common understandings it is pretty evident, that if Christ appeared four times according to John's account, he must have appeared twice according to that of Matthew and Luke, and thrice according to that of Mark.

The different evangelists are not only accused of contradicting each other, but Luke is said to have contradicted himself; for in his Gospel he tells us, that Jesus ascended into heaven from Bethany; and in the Acts of the Apostles, of which he is the reputed author, he informs us that he ascended from Mount Olivet. Your objection

proceeds either from your ignorance of geography, or your ill-will to Christianity; and upon either supposition deserves our contempt: be pleased, however, to remember for the future, that Bethany was not only the name of a town, but of a district of Mount Olivet adjoining to the town.

From this specimen of the contradictions ascribed to the historians of the life of Christ, you may judge for yourselves what little reason there is to reject Christianity upon their account; and how sadly you will be imposed upon (in a matter of more consequence to you than any other) if you take every thing for a contradiction, which the uncandid adversaries of Christianity think proper to call one.

Before I put an end to this address, I cannot help taking notice of an argument, by which some philosophers have of late endeavored to overturn the whole system of revelation; and it is the more necessary to give an answer to their objection, as it is become a common subject of philosophical conversation, especially amongst those who have visited the continent. The objection tends to invalidate, as is supposed, the authority of Moses, by showing, that the earth is much older than it can be proved to be from his account of the creation, and the Scripture chronology. We contend, that six thousand years have not yet elapsed since the creation; and these philosophers contend, that they have indubitable proof of the earth's being at the least fourteen thousand years old; and they complain that Moses hangs as a dead weight upon them, and blunts all their zeal for inquiry.\*

The Canonico Recupero, who, it seems, is engaged in writing the history of Mount Etna, has discovered a stratum of lava, which flowed from that mountain, according to his opinion, in the time of the second Punic war, or about two thousand years ago; this stratum is not yet covered with soil sufficient for the production of either corn or vines; it requires then, says the Canon, two thousand years at least to convert a stratum of lava into a fertile field. In sinking a pit near Jaci, in the neighborhood of Etna, they have discovered evident marks of seven distinct lavas, one under the other; the surfaces of which are parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth; now, the eruption which formed the lowest part of these lavas (if we may be allowed to reason, says the Canon, from analogy) flowed from the mountain at least fourteen thousand years ago. It might be briefly answered to this objection, by denying, that there is any thing in the history of Moses repugnant to this opinion concerning the great antiquity of the earth; for though the rise and progress of arts and sciences, and the small multiplication of the human species, render it almost to a demonstration probable that man has not existed longer upon the surface of this earth than according to the Mosaic account; yet that the earth itself was then created out of nothing, when man was placed upon it, is not, according to the sentiments of some philosophers, to be proved from the original text of sacred Scripture; we might, I say, reply with these

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\* Brydone's Travels.

philosophers to this formidable objection of the Canon, by granting it in its full extent; we are under no necessity, however, of adopting their opinion, in order to show the weakness of the Canon's reasoning. For, in the first place, the Canon has not satisfactorily established his main fact, that the lava in question is the identical lava which Diodorus Siculus mentions to have flowed from Etna, in the second Carthaginian war; and, in the second place, it may be observed, that the time necessary for converting lava into fertile fields must be very different, according to the different consistencies of the lavas, and their different situations, with respect to elevation or depression; to their being exposed to winds, rains, and to other circumstances; just as the time in which the heaps of iron slag (which resembles lava) are covered with verdure, is different at different furnaces, according to the nature of the slag, and situation of the furnace; and something of this kind is deducible from the account of the Canon himself; since the crevices of this famous stratum are really full of rich, good soil, and have pretty large trees growing in them.

But if all this should be thought not sufficient to remove the objection, I will produce the Canon an analogy in opposition to his analogy, and which is grounded on more certain facts. Etna and Vesuvius resemble each other, in the causes which produce their eruptions, and in the nature of their lavas, and in the time necessary to mellow them into soil fit for vegetation; or if there be any slight difference in this respect, it is probably not greater than what subsists between different lavas of the same mountain. This being admitted, which no philosopher will deny, the Canon's analogy will prove just nothing at all, if we can produce an instance of seven different lavas (with interjacent strata of vegetable earth), which have flowed from Mount Vesuvius, within the space, not of fourteen thousand, but of somewhat less than seventeen hundred years; for then, according to our analogy, a stratum of lava may be covered with vegetable soil in about two hundred and fifty years, instead of requiring two thousand for the purpose. The eruption of Vesuvius, which destroyed Herculaneum and Pompeii, is rendered still more famous by the death of Pliny, recorded by his nephew in his letter to Tacitus; this event happened in the year 79; it is not yet then quite seventeen hundred years since Herculaneum was swallowed up; but we are informed by unquestionable authority, that "the matter which covers the ancient town of Herculaneum is not the produce of one eruption only; for there are evident marks, that the matter of six eruptions has taken its course over that which lies immediately above the town, and was the cause of its destruction. These strata are either of lava or burnt matter, *with veins of good soil betwixt them.*"\* I will not add another word upon this subject; except that the bishop of the diocese was not much out in his advice to Canohico Recupero; to take care not

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\* See Sir William Hamilton's Remarks upon the Nature of the Soil of Naples and its Neighborhood, in the Philos. Trans. vol. lxi. p. 7.

to make his mountain older than Moses; though it would have been full as well to have shut his mouth with a reason, as to have stopped it with the dread of an ecclesiastical censure.

You perceive with what ease a little attention will remove a great difficulty; but had we been able to say nothing in explanation of this phenomenon, we should not have acted a very rational part in making our ignorance the foundation of our infidelity, or suffering a minute philosopher to rob us of our religion.

Your objections to revelation may be numerous; you may find fault with the account which Moses has given of the creation and the fall; you may not be able to get water enough for a universal deluge; nor room enough in the ark of Noah for all the different kinds of aerial and terrestrial animals; you may be dissatisfied with the command for sacrificing of Isaac, for plundering the Egyptians, and for extirpating the Canaanites; you may find fault with the Jewish economy, for its ceremonies, its sacrifices, and its multiplicity of priests; you may object to the imprecations in the Psalms, and think the immoralities of David a fit subject for dramatic ridicule;\* you may look upon the partial promulgation of Christianity as an insuperable objection to its truth, and waywardly reject the goodness of God toward yourselves, because you do not comprehend how you have deserved it more than others; you may know nothing of the entrance of sin and death into the world by one man's transgression; nor be able to comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and of redemption by Jesus Christ; in short, if your mind is so disposed, you may find food for your scepticism in every page of the Bible, as well as in every appearance of nature; and it is not in the power of any person, but yourselves, to clear up your doubts; you must read, and you must think for yourselves; and you must do both with temper, with candor, and with care. Infidelity is a rank weed; it is nurtured by our vices, and cannot be plucked up as easily as it may be planted. Your difficulties with respect to revelation may have first arisen from your own reflection on the religious indifference of those, whom, from your earliest infancy, you have been accustomed to revere and imitate: domestic irreligion may have made you a willing hearer of libertine conversation; and the uniform prejudices of the world may have finished the business, at a very early age, and left you to wander through life, without a principle to direct your conduct, and to die without hope. We are far from wishing you to trust the word of the clergy for the truth of your religion; we beg of you to examine it to the bottom, to try it, to prove it, and not to hold it fast unless you find it good. Till you are disposed to undertake this task, it becomes you to consider with great seriousness and attention, whether it can be for your interest to esteem a few witty sarcasms, or metaphysic subtleties, or ignorant misrepresentations, or unwarranted assertions,

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\* See Saul et David Hyperdrame. Whatever censure the author of this composition may deserve for his intention, the work itself deserves none; its ridicule is too gross to mislead even the ignorant.

as unanswerable arguments against revelation ; and a very slight reflection will convince you, that it will certainly be for your reputation to employ the flippancy of your rhetoric, and the poignancy of your ridicule, upon any subject rather than upon the subject of religion.

I take my leave with recommending to your notice the advice which Mr. Locke gave to a young man, who was desirous of becoming acquainted with the doctrines of the Christian religion :—“Study the holy Scripture, especially the New Testament: therein are contained the words of eternal life. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without any mixture of error for its matter.”\* I am, &c.

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\* Locke's Posthumous Works.





**AN**  
**APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE,**  
**IN**  
**A SERIES OF LETTERS,**

**ADDRESSED TO**

**THOMAS PAINE,**

**AUTHOR OF A BOOK, ENTITLED, THE AGE OF REASON, PART THE  
SECOND, BEING AN INVESTIGATION OF TRUE AND OF  
FABULOUS THEOLOGY.**

**BY**

**R. WATSON, D. D. F. R. S.**

**LORD BISHOP OF LANDAFF, AND REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY  
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.**



AN

## APOLOGY FOR THE BIBLE.

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### LETTER I.

SIR;—I have lately met with a book of yours, entitled, "The Age of Reason, part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous theology;" and think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion (for I find little or no novelty in them), but from the zeal with which you labor to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner on such a subject; and I have no reluctance in acknowledging, that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself.

I begin with your preface. You therein state, that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life. I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention. In accomplishing your purpose you will have unsettled the faith of thousands; rooted from the minds of the unhappy virtuous all their comfortable assurance of a future recompense; have annihilated in the minds of the flagitious all their fears of future punishment; you will have given the reins to the domination of every passion, and have thereby contributed to the introduction of the public insecurity, and of the private unhappiness, usually, and almost necessarily accompanying a state of corrupted morals.

No one can think worse of confession to a priest, and subsequent absolution, as practised in the church of Rome, than I do; but I cannot, with you, attribute the guillotine-massacres to that cause. Men's minds were not prepared, as you suppose, for the commission of all manner of crimes, by any doctrines of the church of Rome; corrupted as I esteem it, but by their not thoroughly believing even that religion. What may not society expect from those, who shall imbibe the principles of your book?

A fever, which you, and those about you, expected would prove mortal, made you remember, with renewed satisfaction, that you

had written the former part of your *Age of Reason*; and you know, therefore, you say, by experience, the conscientious trial of your own principles. I admit this declaration to be a proof of the sincerity of your persuasion, but I cannot admit it to be any proof of the truth of your principles. What is conscience? Is it, as has been thought, an internal monitor implanted in us by the Supreme Being, and dictating to us, on all occasions, what is right or wrong? Or is it merely our own judgment of the moral rectitude or turpitude of our own actions? I take the word (with Mr. Locke) in the latter, as in the only intelligible sense. Now who sees not, that our judgments of virtue and vice, right and wrong, are not always formed from an enlightened and dispassionate use of our reason, in the investigation of truth? They are more generally formed from the nature of the religion we profess; from the quality of the civil government under which we live; from the general manners of the age, or the particular manners of the persons with whom we associate; from the education we have had in our youth; from the books we have read at a more advanced period; and from other accidental causes. Who sees not, that, on this account, conscience may be conformable or repugnant to the law of nature? may be certain, or doubtful? and that it can be no criterion of moral rectitude, even when it is certain, because the certainty of an opinion is no proof of its being a right opinion? A man may be certainly persuaded of an error in reasoning, or of an untruth in matters of fact. It is a maxim of every law, human and divine, that a man ought never to act in opposition to his conscience; but it will not from thence follow, that he will, in obeying the dictates of his conscience, on all occasions act right. An inquisitor, who burns Jews and heretics; a Robespierre, who massacres innocent and harmless women; a robber, who thinks that all things ought to be in common, and that a state of property is an unjust infringement of natural liberty;—these, and a thousand perpetrators of different crimes, may all follow the dictates of conscience; and may, at the real or supposed approach of death, remember “with renewed satisfaction” the worst of their transactions, and experience, without dismay, “a conscientious trial of their principles.” But this their conscientious composure can be no proof to others of the rectitude of their principles, and ought to be no pledge to themselves of their innocence in adhering to them.

I have thought fit to make this remark, with a view of suggesting to you a consideration of great importance, whether you have examined calmly, and according to the best of your ability, the arguments by which the truth of revealed religion may, in the judgment of learned and impartial men, be established? You will allow, that thousands of learned and impartial men (I speak not of priests, who, however, are, I trust, as learned and impartial as yourself, but of laymen of the most splendid talents), you will allow, that thousands of these, in all ages, have embraced revealed religion as true. Whether these men have all been in an error, enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, shackled by the chains of superstition, whilst

you and a few others have enjoyed light and liberty, is a question I submit to the decision of your readers.

If you have made the best examination you can, and yet reject revealed religion as an imposture, I pray that God may pardon what I esteem your error. And whether you have made this examination or not, does not become me or any man to determine. That Gospel, which you despise, has taught me this moderation; it has said to me, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." I think that you are in an error; but whether that error be to you a vincible or an invincible error, I presume not to determine. I know, indeed, where it is said, "that, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; and that if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The consequence of your unbelief must be left to the just and merciful judgment of him, who alone knoweth the mechanism and the liberty of our understandings; the origin of our opinions; the strength of our prejudices; the excellencies and the defects of our reasoning faculties.

I shall, designedly, write this and the following Letters in a popular manner; hoping that thereby they may stand a chance of being perused by that class of readers, for whom your work seems to be particularly calculated, and who are the most likely to be injured by it. The really learned are in no danger of being infected by the poison of infidelity; they will excuse me, therefore, for having entered as little as possible into deep disquisitions concerning the authenticity of the Bible. The subject has been so learnedly, and so frequently handled by other writers, that it does not want (I had almost said, it does not admit) any farther proof. And it is the more necessary to adopt this mode of answering your book, because you disclaim all learned appeals to other books, and undertake to prove, from the Bible itself, that it is unworthy of credit. I hope to show, from the Bible itself, the direct contrary. But in case any of your readers should think that you had not put forth all your strength, by not referring for proof of your opinion to ancient authors; lest they should suspect, that all ancient authors are in your favor; I will venture to affirm, that had you made a learned appeal to all the ancient books in the world, sacred or profane, Christian, Jewish, or Pagan, instead of lessening, they would have established the credit and authority of the Bible as the word of God.

Quitting your preface, let us proceed to the work itself; in which there is much repetition, and a defect of proper arrangement. I will follow your track, however, as nearly as I can. The first question you propose for consideration is, "Whether there is sufficient authority for believing the Bible to be the word of God, or whether there is not?" You determine this question in the negative, upon what you are pleased to call moral evidence. You hold it impossible, that the Bible can be the word of God, because it is therein said, that the Israelites destroyed the Canaanites by the express command of God; and to believe the Bible to be true, we must, you affirm, unbelieve all our belief of the moral justice of

God ; for wherein, you ask, could crying or smiling infants offend ? I am astonished that so acute a reasoner should attempt to disparage the Bible, by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. You profess yourself to be a deist, and to believe that there is a God, who created the universe, and established the laws of nature, by which it is sustained in existence. You profess, that, from the contemplation of the works of God, you derive a knowledge of his attributes ; and you reject the Bible, because it ascribes to God things inconsistent (as you suppose) with the attributes which you have discovered to belong to him ; in particular, you think it repugnant to his moral justice, that he should doom to destruction the crying or smiling infants of the Canaanites. Why do you not maintain it to be repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or destroyed by a pestilence ? The word of God is in perfect harmony with his work ; crying or smiling infants are subjected to death in both. We believe that the earth, at the express command of God, opened her mouth, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This you esteem so repugnant to God's moral justice, that you spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive ; why do you not spurn, as spurious, the book of nature in which this fact is certainly written, and from the perusal of which you infer the moral justice of God ? You will, probably, reply, that the evils, which the Canaanites suffered from the express command of God, were different from those which are brought on mankind by the operation of the laws of nature. Different ! in what ? Not in the magnitude of the evil ; not in the subjects of sufferance ; not in the author of it ; for my philosophy, at least, instructs me to believe, that God not only primarily formed, but that he hath, through all ages, executed the laws of nature ; and that he will, through all eternity, administer them for the general happiness of his creatures, whether we can, on every occasion, discern that end or not.

I am far from being guilty of the impiety of questioning the existence of the moral justice of God, as proved either by natural or revealed religion ; what I contend for is shortly this :—That you have no right, in fairness of reasoning, to urge any apparent deviation from moral justice as an argument against revealed religion, because you do not urge an equally apparent deviation from it as an argument against natural religion ; you reject the former, and admit the latter, without adverting, that, as to your objections, they must stand or fall together.

As to the Canaanites, it is needless to enter into any proof of the depraved state of their morals ; they were a wicked people in the time of Abraham, and they, even then, were devoted to destruction by God ; but their iniquity was not then full. In the time of Moses,

they were idolaters, sacrificers of their own crying or smiling infants; devourers of human flesh; addicted to unnatural lust; immersed in the filthiness of all manner of vice. Now, I think, it will be impossible to prove, that it was a proceeding contrary to God's moral justice to exterminate so wicked a people. He made the Israelites the executors of his vengeance; and, in doing this, he gave such an evident and terrible proof of his abomination of vice, as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror, and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they followed the example of the nations whom he commanded them to cut off. "Ye shall not commit any of these abominations, that the land spue not you out also, as it spued out the nations that were before you." How strong and descriptive this language! The vices of the inhabitants were so abominable, that the very land was sick of them, and forced to vomit them forth, as the stomach disgorges a deadly poison.

I have often wondered what could be the reason, that men, not destitute of talents, should be desirous of undermining the authority of revealed religion, and studious in exposing, with a malignant and illiberal exultation, every little difficulty attending the Scriptures, to popular animadversion and contempt. I am not willing to attribute this strange propensity to what Plato attributed the atheism of his time; to profligacy of manners; to affectation of singularity; to gross ignorance, assuming the semblance of deep research and superior sagacity; I had rather refer it to an impropriety of judgment, respecting the manners and mental acquirements of human kind in the first ages of the world. Most unbelievers argue as if they thought, that man, in remote and rude antiquity, in the very birth and infancy of our species, had the same distinct conceptions of one eternal; invisible, incorporeal, infinitely wise, powerful, and good God, which they themselves have now. This I look upon as a great mistake, and a pregnant source of infidelity. Human kind, by long experience, by the institutions of civil society; by the cultivation of arts and sciences; by, as I believe, Divine instruction actually given to some, and traditionally communicated to all; is in a far more distinguished situation, as to the powers of the mind, than it was in the childhood of the world. The history of man is the history of the providence of God; who, willing the supreme felicity of all his creatures, has adapted his government to the capacity of those, who, in different ages, were the subjects of it. The history of any one nation throughout all ages, and that of all nations in the same age, are but separate parts of one great plan, which God is carrying on for the moral melioration of mankind. But who can comprehend the whole of this immense design? The shortness of life, the weakness of our faculties, the inadequacy of our means of information, conspire to make it impossible for us, worms of the earth! insects of an hour! completely to understand any one of its parts. No man, who well weighs the subject, ought to be surprised, that in the histories of ancient times many things should occur



foreign to our manners, the propriety and necessity of which we cannot clearly apprehend.

It appears incredible to many, that God Almighty should have had colloquial intercourse with our first parents; that he should have contracted a kind of friendship for the patriarchs, and entered into covenants with them; that he should have suspended the laws of nature in Egypt; should have been so apparently partial as to become the God and governor of one particular nation; and should have so far demeaned himself as to give to that people a burthensome ritual of worship, statutes, and ordinances, many of which seem to be beneath the dignity of his attention, unimportant and impolitic. I have conversed with many deists, and have always found, that the strangeness of these things was the only reason for their disbelief of them: nothing similar has happened in their time; they will not, therefore, admit that these events have really taken place at any time. As well might a child, when arrived at a state of manhood, contend, that he had never either stood in need of or experienced the fostering care of a mother's kindness, the wearisome attention of his nurse, or the instruction and discipline of his schoolmaster. The Supreme Being selected one family from an idolatrous world; nursed it up, by various acts of his providence, into a great nation; communicated to that nation a knowledge of his holiness, justice, mercy, power, and wisdom; disseminated them, at various times, through every part of the earth, that they might be a "leaven to leaven the whole lump," that they might assure all other nations of the existence of one supreme God, the creator and preserver of the world; the only proper object of adoration. With what reason can we expect, that what was done to one nation, not out of any partiality to them, but for the general good, should be done to all? that the mode of instruction, which was suited to the infancy of the world, should be extended to the maturity of its manhood, or to the imbecility of its old age? I own to you, that when I consider how nearly man, in a savage state, approaches to the brute creation, as to intellectual excellence; and when I contemplate his miserable attainments, as to the knowledge of God, in a civilized state, when he has had no divine instruction on the subject, or when that instruction has been forgotten (for all men have known something of God from tradition), I cannot but admire the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, in having let himself down to our apprehensions; in having given to mankind, in the earliest ages, sensible and extraordinary proofs of his existence and attributes; in having made the Jewish and Christian dispensations mediums to convey to all men, through all ages, that knowledge concerning himself, which he had vouchsafed to give immediately to the first. I own it is strange, very strange, that he should have made an immediate manifestation of himself in the first ages of the world; but what is there that is not strange? It is strange that you and I are here; that there is water, and earth, and air, and fire; that there is a sun, and moon, and stars; that there is generation, corruption, reproduction. I can account ultimately for

none of these things, without recurring to him who made every thing. I also am his workmanship, and look up to him with hope of preservation through all eternity; I adore him for his word as well as for his work: his work I cannot comprehend, but his word hath assured me of all that I am concerned to know; that he hath prepared everlasting happiness for those who love and obey him. This you will call preachment; I will have done with it; but the subject is so vast, and the plan of Providence, in my opinion, so obviously wise and good, that I can never think of it without having my mind filled with piety, admiration, and gratitude.

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten, in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth forfeits with me all claim to candor and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, nor liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.

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## LETTER II.

BEFORE you commence your grand attack upon the Bible, you wish to establish a difference between the evidence necessary to prove the authenticity of the Bible, and that of any other ancient book. I am not surprised at your anxiety on this head; for all writers on the subject have agreed in thinking, that St. Austin reasoned well, when, in vindicating the genuineness of the Bible, he asked: "What proofs have we that the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and other profane authors, were written by those whose names they bear, unless it be that this has been an opinion generally received at all times, and by all those who have lived since these authors?" This writer was convinced, that the evidence, which established the genuineness of any profane book, would establish that of a sacred book; and I profess myself to be of the same opinion, notwithstanding what you have advanced to the contrary.

In this part your ideas seem to me to be confused; I do not say that you, designedly, jumble together mathematical science and historical evidence; the knowledge acquired by demonstration, and the probability derived from testimony. You know but of one ancient book, that authoritatively challenges universal consent and belief, and that is Euclid's Elements. If I were disposed to make frivolous objections, I should say, that even Euclid's Elements had

not met with universal consent; that there had been men, both in ancient and modern times, who had questioned the intuitive evidence of some of his axioms, and denied the justness of some of his demonstrations: but, admitting the truth, I do not see the pertinency of your observation. You are attempting to subvert the authenticity of the Bible, and you tell us that Euclid's Elements are certainly true. What then? Does it follow that the Bible is certainly false? The most illiterate scrivener in the kingdom does not want to be informed, that the examples in his Wingate's Arithmetic are proved by a different kind of reasoning from that by which he persuades himself to believe, that there was such a person as Henry VIII. or that there is such a city as Paris.

It may be of use, to remove this confusion in your argument, to state, distinctly, the difference between the genuineness, and the authenticity, of a book. A genuine book is that which was written by the person whose name it bears, as the author of it. An authentic book is that which relates matters of fact, as they really happened. A book may be genuine, without being authentic; and a book may be authentic, without being genuine. The books written by Richardson and Fielding are genuine books, though the histories of *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones* are fables. The history of the island of *Formosa* is a genuine book; it was written by *Psalmazar*; but it is not an authentic book (though it was long esteemed as such, and translated into different languages), for the author, in the latter part of his life, took shame to himself for having imposed on the world, and confessed that it was a mere romance. *Anson's Voyage* may be considered as an authentic book, it, probably, containing a true narration of the principal events recorded in it; but it is not a genuine book, having not been written by *Walters*, to whom it is ascribed, but by *Robins*.

This distinction, between the genuineness and authenticity of a book, will assist us in detecting the fallacy of an argument, which you state with great confidence in the part of your work now under consideration, and which you frequently allude to, in other parts, as conclusive evidence against the truth of the Bible. Your argument stands thus: if it be found that the books ascribed to *Moses*, *Joshua*, and *Samuel*, were not written by *Moses*, *Joshua*, and *Samuel*, every part of the authority and authenticity of these books is gone at once. I presume to think otherwise. The genuineness of these books (in the judgment of those who say that they were written by these authors) will certainly be gone; but their authenticity may remain; they may still contain a true account of real transactions, though the names of the writers of them should be found to be different from what they are generally esteemed to be.

Had, indeed, *Moses* said that he wrote the five first books of the Bible; and had *Joshua* and *Samuel* said that they wrote the books which are respectively attributed to them; and had it been found, that *Moses*, *Joshua*, and *Samuel*, did not write these books; then, I grant, the authority of the whole would have been gone at once:

these men would have been found liars, as to the genuineness of the books; and this proof of their want of veracity, in one point, would have invalidated their testimony in every other; these books would have been justly stigmatized, as neither genuine nor authentic.

A history may be true, though it should not only be ascribed to a wrong author, but though the author of it should not be known; anonymous testimony does not destroy the reality of facts, whether natural or miraculous. Had Lord Clarendon published his *History of the Rebellion*, without prefixing his name to it; or had the *History of Titus Livius* come down to us under the name of *Valerius Flaccus*, or *Valerius Maximus*; the facts mentioned in these histories would have been equally certain.

As to your assertion, that the miracles recorded in Tacitus, and in other profane historians, are quite as well authenticated as those of the Bible; it being a mere assertion, destitute of proof, may be properly answered by a contrary assertion. I take the liberty then to say, that the evidence for the miracles recorded in the Bible is, both in kind and degree, so greatly superior to that for the prodigies mentioned by Livy, or the miracles related by Tacitus, as to justify us in giving credit to the one as the work of God, and in withholding it from the other as the effect of superstition and imposture. This method of derogating from the credibility of Christianity, by opposing to the miracles of our Saviour the tricks of ancient impostors, seems to have originated with Hierocles in the fourth century; and it has been adopted by unbelievers from that time to this; with this difference, indeed, that the heathens of the third and fourth century admitted that Jesus wrought miracles; but, lest that admission should have compelled them to abandon their gods and become Christians, they said, that their Apollonius, their Apuleius, their Aristeas, did as great: whilst modern deists deny the fact of Jesus having ever wrought a miracle. And they have some reason for this proceeding; they are sensible, that the Gospel miracles are so different, in all their circumstances, from those related in Pagan story, that, if they admit them to have been performed, they must admit Christianity to be true; hence they have fabricated a kind of deistical axiom; that no human testimony can establish the credibility of a miracle. This, though it has been a hundred times refuted, is still insisted upon, as if its truth had never been questioned, and could not be disproved.

You "proceed to examine the authenticity of the Bible; and you begin, you say, with what are called the five books of Moses; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Your intention, you profess, is to show that these books are spurious, and that Moses is not the author of them; and still farther, that they were not written in the time of Moses, nor till several hundred years afterwards; that they are no other than an attempted history of the life of Moses, and of the times in which he is said to have lived, and also of the times prior thereto, written by some very ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, several hundred years after the death

of Moses." In this passage the utmost force of your attack on the authority of the five books of Moses is clearly stated. You are not the first who has started this difficulty; it is a difficulty, indeed, of modern date; having not been heard of, either in the synagogue, or out of it, till the twelfth century. About that time Aben Ezra, a Jew of great erudition, noticed some passages (the same that you have brought forward) in the five first books of the Bible, which he thought had not been written by Moses, but inserted by some person after the death of Moses. But he was far from maintaining, as you do, that these books were written by some ignorant and stupid pretender to authorship, many hundred years after the death of Moses. Hobbes contends, that the books of Moses are so called, not from their having been written by Moses, but from their containing an account of Moses. Spinoza supported the same opinion; and Le Clerc, a very able theological critic of the last and present century, once entertained the same notion. You see that this fancy has had some patrons before you; the merit or the demerit, the sagacity or the temerity of having asserted, that Moses is not the author of the Pentateuch, is not exclusively yours. Le Clerc, indeed, you must not boast of. When his judgment was matured by age, he was ashamed of what he had written on the subject in his younger years; he made a public recantation of his error, by annexing to his commentary on Genesis a Latin dissertation, concerning Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, and his design in composing it. If in your future life you should chance to change your opinion on the subject, it will be an honor to your character to emulate the integrity, and to imitate the example of Le Clerc. The Bible is not the only book which has undergone the fate of being reprobated as spurious, after it had been received as genuine and authentic for many ages. It has been maintained, that the history of Herodotus was written in the time of Constantine; and that the classics are forgeries of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. These extravagant reveries amused the world at the time of their publication, and have long since sunk into oblivion. You esteem all prophets to be such lying rascals, that I dare not venture to predict the fate of your book.

Before you produce your main objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you assert, "that there is no affirmative evidence that Moses is the author of them." What! no affirmative evidence! In the eleventh century Maimonides drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit; it consists of only thirteen articles; and two of them have respect to Moses; one affirming the authenticity, the other the genuineness of his books. The doctrine and prophecy of Moses is true. The law that we have was given by Moses. This is the faith of the Jews at present, and has been their faith ever since the destruction of their city and temple; it was their faith in the time when the authors of the New Testament wrote; it was their faith during their captivity in Babylon; in the time of their kings and judges; and no period can be shown, from the age of Moses to the present hour, in which it was

not their faith. Is this no affirmative evidence? I cannot desire a stronger. Josephus, in his book against Apion, writes thus: "We have only two and twenty books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all ages; five belong to Moses, which contain the original of man, and the tradition of the succession of generations, down to his death, which takes in a compass of about three thousand years." Do you consider this as no affirmative evidence? Why should I mention Juvenal speaking of the volume which Moses has written? Why enumerate a long list of profane authors, all bearing testimony to the fact of Moses being the leader and the lawgiver of the Jewish nation; and if a lawgiver, surely a writer of the laws. But what says the Bible? In Exodus it says, "Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people." In Deuteronomy it says, "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished (this surely imports the finishing a laborious work), that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." This is said in Deuteronomy, which is kind of repetition or abridgment of the four preceding books; and it is well known, that the Jews gave the name of the Law to the first five books of the Old Testament. What possible doubt can there be that Moses wrote the books in question? I could accumulate many other passages from the Scriptures to this purpose; but if what I have advanced will not convince you that there is affirmative evidence, and of the strongest kind, for Moses's being the author of these books, nothing that I can advance will convince you.

What if I should grant all you undertake to prove (the stupidity and ignorance of the writer excepted)? What if I should admit, that Samuel, or Ezra, or some other learned Jew, composed these books, from public records, many years after the death of Moses? Will it follow that there was no truth in them? According to my logic, it will only follow, that they are not genuine books; every fact recorded in them may be true, whenever, or by whomsoever they were written. It cannot be said that the Jews had no public records; the Bible furnishes abundance of proof to the contrary. I by no means admit, that these books, as to the main part of them, were not written by Moses; but I do contend, that a book may contain a true history, though we know not the author of it; or though we may be mistaken in ascribing it to a wrong author.

The first argument you produce against Moses being the author of these books is so old, that I do not know its original author; and it is so miserable a one, that I wonder you should adopt it. "These books cannot be written by Moses, because they are wrote in the third person; it is always, The Lord said unto Moses, or Moses said unto the Lord. This," you say, "is the style and manner that historians use in speaking of the person whose lives and actions they

are writing." This observation is true, but it does not extend far enough; for this is the style and manner, not only of historians writing of other persons, but of eminent men, such as Xenophon and Josephus, writing of themselves. If General Washington should write the history of the American war, and should, from his great modesty, speak of himself in the third person, would you think it reasonable, that, two or three thousand years hence, any person should, on that account, contend, that the history was not true? Cæsar writes of himself in the third person: it is always, Cæsar made a speech, or a speech was made to Cæsar, Cæsar crossed the Rhine, Cæsar invaded Britain; but every schoolboy knows, that this circumstance cannot be adduced as a serious argument against Cæsar's being the author of his own Commentaries.

But Moses, you urge, cannot be the author of the book of Numbers, because he says of himself, "that Moses was a very meek man, above all the men that were on the face of the earth." If he said this of himself, he was, you say, "a vain and arrogant coxcomb (such is your phrase!), and unworthy of credit; and if he did not say it, the books are without authority." This your dilemma is perfectly harmless; it has not a horn to hurt the weakest logician. If Moses did not write this little verse, if it was inserted by Samuel, or any of his countrymen, who knew his character and revered his memory, will it follow that he did not write any other part of the book of Numbers? Or if he did not write any part of the book of Numbers, will it follow that he did not write any of the other books of which he is usually reputed the author? And if he did write this of himself, he was justified by the occasion which extorted from him this commendation. Had this expression been written in a modern style and manner, it would probably have given you no offence. For who would be so fastidious as to find fault with an illustrious man, who being calumniated by his nearest relations, as guilty of pride and fond of power, should vindicate his character by saying, my temper was naturally as meek and unassuming as that of any man upon earth? There are occasions, in which a modest man, who speaks truly, may speak proudly of himself, without forfeiting his general character; and there is no occasion, which either more requires, or more excuses this conduct, than when he is repelling the foul and envious aspersions of those, who both knew his character and had experienced his kindness: and in that predicament stood Aaron and Miriam, the accusers of Moses. You yourself have, probably, felt the sting of calumny, and have been anxious to remove the impression. I do not call you a vain and arrogant coxcomb for vindicating your character, when in the latter part of this very work you boast, and I hope truly, "that the man does not exist that can say I have persecuted him, or any man, or any set of men, in the American revolution, or in the French revolution; or that I have in any case returned evil for evil." I know not what kings and priests may say to this; you may not have returned to them evil for evil, because they never, I believe, did you

any harm ; but you have done them all the harm you could, and that without provocation.

I think it needless to notice your observation upon what you call the dramatic style of Deuteronomy ; it is an ill-founded hypothesis. You might as well ask where the author of Cæsar's Commentaries got the speeches of Cæsar, as where the author of Deuteronomy got the speeches of Moses. But your argument, that Moses was not the author of Deuteronomy, because the reason given in that book for the observation of the sabbath is different from that given in Exodus, merits a reply.

You need not be told, that the very name of this book imports, in Greek, a repetition of a law ; and that the Hebrew doctors have called it by a word of the same meaning. In the fifth verse of the first chapter, it is said in our Bibles, "Moses began to declare this law ;" but the Hebrew words, more properly translated, import, that Moses "began, or determined, to explain the law." This is no shift of mine to get over a difficulty ; the words are so rendered in most of the ancient versions, and by Fagius, Vatablus, and Le Clerc, men eminently skilled in the Hebrew language. This repetition and explanation of the law was a wise and benevolent proceeding in Moses ; that those who were either not born, or were mere infants, when it was first (forty years before) delivered in Horeb, might have an opportunity of knowing it ; especially as Moses their leader was soon to be taken from them, and they were about to be settled in the midst of nations given to idolatry and sunk in vice. Now where is the wonder, that some variations, and some additions, should be made to a law, when a legislator thinks fit to republish it many years after its first promulgation ?

With respect to the sabbath, the learned are divided in opinion concerning its origin ; some contending that it was sanctified from the creation of the world ; that it was observed by the patriarchs before the flood ; that it was neglected by the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt ; revived on the falling of manna in the wilderness ; and enjoined, as a positive law, at Mount Sinai. Others esteem its institution to have been no older than the age of Moses ; and argue, that what is said of the sanctification of the sabbath in the book of Genesis, is said by way of anticipation. There may be truth in both these accounts. To me it is probable, that the memory of the creation was handed down from Adam to all his posterity ; and that the seventh day was, for a long time, held sacred by all nations in commemoration of that event ; but that the peculiar rigidity of its observance was enjoined by Moses to the Israelites alone. As to there being two reasons given for its being kept holy—one, that on that day God rested from the work of creation—the other, that on that day God had given them rest from the servitude of Egypt—I see no contradiction in the accounts. If a man, in writing the history of England, should inform his readers, that the parliament had ordered the 5th of November to be kept holy, because on that day God had delivered the nation from a bloody-intended massacre by gunpowder ; and if, in another part of his



history, he should assign the deliverance of our church and nation from popery and arbitrary power, by the arrival of King William, as a reason for its being kept holy; would any one contend, that he was not justified in both these ways of expression, or that we ought from thence to conclude that he was not the author of them both?

You think "that law in Deuteronomy inhuman and brutal, which authorizes parents, the father and the mother, to bring their own children to have them stoned to death for what it is pleased to call stubbornness." You are aware, I suppose, that paternal power amongst the Romans, the Gauls, the Persians, and other nations, was of the most arbitrary kind; that it extended to the taking away the life of the child. I do not know whether the Israelites in the time of Moses exercised this paternal power; it was not a custom adopted by all nations, but it was by many; and in the infancy of society, before individual families had coalesced into communities, it was probably very general. Now Moses, by this law, which you esteem brutal and inhuman, hindered such an extravagant power from being either introduced or exercised amongst the Israelites. This law is so far from countenancing the arbitrary power of a father over the life of his child, that it takes from him the power of accusing the child before a magistrate; the father and the mother of the child must agree in bringing the child to judgment; and it is not by their united will that the child was to be condemned to death; the elders of the city were to judge whether the accusation was true; and the accusation was to be, not merely, as you insinuate, that the child was stubborn, but that he was "stubborn and rebellious, a glutton and a drunkard." Considered in this light, you must allow the law to have been a humane restriction of a power improper to be lodged with any parent.

That you may abuse the priests, you abandon your subject—"priests (you say) preach up Deuteronomy, for Deuteronomy preaches up tithes." I do not know that priests preach up Deuteronomy more than they preach up other books of Scripture; but I do know that tithes are not preached up in Deuteronomy more than in Leviticus, in Numbers, in Chronicles, in Malachi, in the law, the history, and the prophets of the Jewish nation. You go on, "it is from this book, chap. xxv, ver. 4, they have taken the phrase and applied it to tithing, 'thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn;' and that this might not escape observation, they have noted it in the table of contents at the head of the chapter, though it is only a single verse of less than two lines. O priests! priests! ye are willing to be compared to an ox for the sake of tithes!" I cannot call this reasoning, and I will not pollute my page by giving it a proper appellation. Had the table of contents, instead of simply saying, the ox is not to be muzzled, said, tithes enjoined, or priests to be maintained, there would have been a little ground for your censure. Whoever noted this phrase at the head of the chapter had better reason for doing it than you have attributed to them.

They did it, because St. Paul had quoted it, when he was proving to the Corinthians, that they who preached the Gospel had a right

to live by the Gospel; it was Paul, and not the priests, who first applied this phrase to tithing. St. Paul, indeed, did not avail himself of the right he contended for; he was not, therefore, interested in what he said. The reason on which he grounds the right, is not merely this quotation which you ridicule; nor the appointment of the law of Moses, which you think fabulous; nor the injunction of Jesus, which you despise; no, it is a reason founded in the nature of things, and which no philosopher, no unbeliever, no man of common sense can deny to be a solid reason; it amounts to this, that "the laborer is worthy of his hire." Nothing is so much a man's own as his labor and ingenuity; and it is entirely consonant to the law of nature, that by the innocent use of these he should provide for his subsistence. Husbandmen, artists, soldiers, physicians, lawyers, all let out their labor and talents for a stipulated reward: why may not a priest do the same? Some accounts of you have been published in England; but, conceiving them to have proceeded from a design to injure your character, I never read them. I know nothing of your parentage, your education, or condition in life. You may have been elevated by your birth above the necessity of acquiring the means of sustaining life by the labor of either hand or head: if this be the case, you ought not to despise those who have come into the world in less favorable circumstances. If your origin has been less fortunate, you must have supported yourself, either by manual labor, or the exercise of your genius. Why should you think that conduct disreputable in priests, which you probably consider as laudable in yourself? I know not whether you have not as great a dislike of kings as of priests: but, that you may be induced to think more favorably of men of my profession, I will just mention to you, that the payment of tithes is no new institution, but that they were paid in the most ancient times, not to priests only, but to kings. I could give you a hundred instances of this: two may be sufficient. Abraham paid tithes to the king of Salem, four hundred years before the law of Moses was given. The king of Salem was priest also of the most high God. Priests, you see, existed in the world, and were held in high estimation, for kings were priests, long before the impostures, as you esteem them, of the Jewish and Christian dispensations were heard of. But as this instance is taken from a book which you call "a book of contradictions and lies"—the Bible, I will give you another, from a book, to the authority of which, as it is written by a profane author, you probably will not object. Diogenes Laertius, in his *Life of Solon*, cites a letter of Pisistratus to that lawgiver, in which he says, "I, Pisistratus, the tyrant, am contented with the stipends which were paid to those who reigned before me; the people of Athens set apart a tenth of the fruits of their land, not for my private use, but to be expended in the public sacrifices, and for the general good."

## LETTER III.

HAVING done with what you call the grammatical evidence that Moses was not the author of the books attributed to him, you come to your historical and chronological evidence; and you begin with Genesis. Your first argument is taken from the single word *Dan* being found in Genesis, when it appears from the book of Judges, that the town of Laish was not called Dan till above three hundred and thirty years after the death of Moses; therefore, the writer of Genesis, you conclude, must have lived after the town of Laish had the name of Dan given to it. Lest this objection should not be obvious enough to a common capacity, you illustrate it in the following manner: "Havre-de-Grace was called Havre-Marat in 1793; should then any dateless writing be found, in after times, with the name of Havre-Marat, it would be certain evidence that such a writing could not have been written till after the year 1793." This is a wrong conclusion. Suppose some hot republican should at this day publish a new edition of any old history of France, and instead of Havre-de-Grace should write Havre-Marat; and that two or three thousand years hence a man, like yourself, should, on that account, reject the whole history as spurious, would he be justified in so doing? Would it not be reasonable to tell him, that the name Havre-Marat had been inserted, not by the original author of the history, but by a subsequent editor of it; and to refer him, for a proof of the genuineness of the book, to the testimony of the whole French nation? This supposition so obviously applies to your difficulty, that I cannot but recommend it to your impartial attention. But if this solution does not please you, I desire it may be proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the same town as the *Dan*, mentioned in Judges. I desire, farther, to have it proved, that the *Dan*, mentioned in Genesis, was the name of a town, and not of a river. It is merely said, Abram pursued them, the enemies of Lot, to Dan. Now a river was full as likely as a town to stop a pursuit. *Lot*, we know, was settled in the plain of *Jordan*; and *Jordan*, we know, was composed of the united streams of two rivers, called *Jor* and *Dan*.

Your next difficulty respects its being said in Genesis, "These are the kings that reigned in *Edom* before there reigned any king over the children of Israel: this passage could only have been written, you say (and I think you say rightly), after the first king began to reign over Israel; so far from being written by Moses, it could not have been written till the time of Saul at the least." I admit this inference, but I deny its application. A small addition to a book does not destroy either the genuineness or the authenticity of the whole book. I am not ignorant of the manner in which commentators have answered this objection of Spinoza, without making the concessions which I have made; but I have no scruple in admitting, that the passage in question, consisting of nine verses

containing the genealogy of some kings of Edom, might have been inserted in the book of Genesis, after the book of Chronicles (which was called in Greek by a name importing that it contained things left out in other books) was written. The learned have shown, that interpolations have happened to other books; but these insertions by other hands have never been considered as invalidating the authority of those books.

"Take away from Genesis," you say, "the belief that Moses was the author, on which only the strange belief that it is the word of God has stood, and there remains nothing of Genesis but an anonymous book of stories, fables, traditionary or invented absurdities, or of downright lies."—What! is it a story then, that the world had a beginning, and that the author of it was God? If you deem this a story, I am not disputing with a deistical philosopher, but with an atheistic madman. Is it a story, that our first parents fell from a paradisiacal state; that this earth was destroyed by a deluge; that Noah and his family were preserved in the ark, and that the world has been re-peopled by his descendants? Look into a book so common, that almost every body has it, and so excellent that no person ought to be without it—Grotius on the truth of the Christian religion, and you will there meet with abundant testimony to the truth of all the principal facts recorded in Genesis. The testimony is not that of Jews, Christians, and priests; it is the testimony of the philosophers, historians, and poets of antiquity. The oldest book in the world is Genesis; and it is remarkable, that those books, which come nearest to it in age, are those which make, either the most distinct mention, or the most evident allusion to the facts related in Genesis, concerning the formation of the world from a chaotic mass, the primeval innocence and subsequent fall of man, the longevity of mankind in the first ages of the world, the depravity of the antediluvians, and the destruction of the world. Read the tenth chapter of Genesis. It may appear to you to contain nothing but an uninteresting narrative of the descendants of *Shem*, *Ham*, and *Japheth*; a mere fable, an invented absurdity, a downright lie. No, sir, it is one of the most valuable, and the most venerable records of antiquity. It explains what all profane historians were ignorant of—the origin of nations. Had it told us, as other books do, that one nation had sprung out of the earth they inhabited; another from a cricket or a grasshopper; another from an oak; another from a mushroom; another from a dragon's tooth; then, indeed, it would have merited the appellation you, with so much temerity, bestow upon it. Instead of these absurdities, it gives such an account of the peopling the earth after the deluge as no other book in the world ever did give; and the truth of which all other books in the world, which contain any thing on the subject, confirm. The last verse of the chapter says, "These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations; and by these were the nations divided in the earth, after the flood." It would require great learning to trace out, precisely, either the actual situation of all the countries in which these founders of em-

pires settled, or to ascertain the extent of their dominions. This, however, has been done by various authors, to the satisfaction of all competent judges; so much, at least, to my satisfaction, that had I no other proof of the authenticity of Genesis, I should consider this as sufficient. But, without the aid of learning, any man who can barely read his Bible, and has but heard of such people as the Assyrians, the Elamites, the Lydians, the Medes, the Ionians, the Thracians, will readily acknowledge, that they had Assur, and Elam, and Lud, and Madai, and Javan, and Tiras, grandsons of Noah, for their respective founders; and knowing this, he will not, I hope, part with his Bible, as a system of fables. I am no enemy to philosophy; but when philosophy would rob me of my Bible, I must say of it, as Cicero said of the twelve tables, this little book alone exceeds the libraries of all the philosophers in the weight of its authority, and in the extent of its utility.

From the abuse of the Bible you proceed to that of Moses, and again bring forward the subject of his wars in the land of Canaan. There are many men who look upon all war (would to God that all men saw it in the same light!) with extreme abhorrence, as afflicting mankind with calamities not necessary, shocking to humanity, and repugnant to reason. But is it repugnant to reason, that God should, by an express act of his providence, destroy a wicked nation? I am fond of considering the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, of considering his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations with the rod of his wrath; but I am persuaded that all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin; are calculated to lessen its influence; and are proofs of his goodness; inasmuch as it may not be possible for Omnipotence itself to communicate supreme happiness to the human race, whilst they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the Canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning. Moses would have been the wretch you represent him, had he acted by his own authority alone; but you may as reasonably attribute cruelty and murder to the judge of the land in condemning criminals to death, as butchery and massacre to Moses in executing the command of God.

The Midianites, through the counsel of Balaam, and by the vicious instrumentality of their women, had seduced a part of the Israelites to idolatry; to the impure worship of their infamous god Baalpeor: for this offence, twenty-four thousand Israelites had perished in a plague from heaven, and Moses received a command from God "to smite the Midianites who had beguiled the people." An army was equipped, and sent against Midian. When the army returned victorious, Moses and the princes of the congregation went to meet it; "and Moses was wroth with the officers." He observed the women captives, and he asked with astonishment, "Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit tres-

pass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation." He then gave an order, that the boys and the women should be put to death, but that the young maidens should be kept alive for themselves. I see nothing in this proceeding, but good policy, combined with mercy. The young men might have become dangerous avengers of, what they would esteem, their country's wrongs; the mothers might have again allured the Israelites to the love of licentious pleasures and the practice of idolatry, and brought another plague upon the congregation; but the young maidens, not being polluted by the flagitious habits of their mothers, nor likely to create disturbance by rebellion, were kept alive. You give a different turn to the matter; you say, "that thirty-two thousand women-children were consigned to debauchery by the order of Moses." Prove this, and I will allow that Moses was the horrid monster you make him; prove this, and I will allow that the Bible is what you call it, "a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy;" prove this, or excuse my warmth if I say to you, as Paul said to Elymas the sorcerer, who sought to turn away Sergius Paulus from the faith, "O full of all subtilty, and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" I did not, when I began these Letters, think that I should have been moved to this severity of rebuke, by any thing you could have written; but when so gross a misrepresentation is made of God's proceedings, coolness would be a crime. The women-children were not reserved for the purposes of debauchery, but of slavery; a custom abhorrent from our manners, but everywhere practised in former times, and still practised in countries where the benignity of the Christian religion has not softened the ferocity of human nature. You here admit a part of the account given in the Bible respecting the expedition against Midian to be a true account: it is not unreasonable to desire that you will admit the whole, or show sufficient reason why you admit one part, and reject the other. I will mention the part to which you have paid no attention. The Israelitish army consisted but of twelve thousand men, a mere handful when opposed to the people of Midian; yet, when the officers made a muster of their troops after their return from the war, they found that they had not lost a single man! This circumstance struck them as so decisive an evidence of God's interposition, that out of the spoils they had taken they offered "an oblation to the Lord, an atonement for their souls." Do but believe what the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, believed at the time when these things happened, and we shall never more hear of your objections to the Bible, from its account of the wars of Moses.

You produce two or three other objections respecting the genuineness of the first five books of the Bible. I cannot stop to notice them: every commentator answers them in a manner suited to the apprehension of even a mere English reader. You calculate, to the thousandth part of an inch, the length of the iron bed of Og the king of Basan; but you do not prove that the bed was too big for the

body, or that a Patagonian would have been lost in it. You make no allowance for the size of a royal bed ; nor ever suspect, that king Og might have been possessed with the same kind of vanity, which occupied the mind of king Alexander, when he ordered his soldiers to enlarge the size of their beds, that they might give to the Indians, in succeeding ages, a great idea of the prodigious stature of a Macedonian. In many parts of your work you speak much in commendation of science. I join with you in every commendation you can give it ; but you speak of it in such a manner, as gives room to believe, that you are a great proficient in it ; if this be the case, I would recommend a problem to your attention, the solution of which you will readily allow to be far above the powers of a man conversant only, as you represent priests and bishops to be, in *hic, hæc, hoc*. The problem is this, to determine the height to which a human body, preserving its similarity of figure, may be augmented, before it will perish by its own weight. When you have solved this problem, we shall know whether the bed of the king of Basan was too big for any giant ; whether the existence of a man twelve or fifteen feet high is in the nature of things impossible. My philosophy teaches me to doubt of many things ; but it does not teach me to reject every testimony which is opposite to my experience : had I been born in Shetland, I could, on proper testimony, have believed in the existence of the Lincolnshire ox, or of the largest dray-horse in London ; though the oxen and horses in Shetland had not been bigger than mastiffs.

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#### LETTER IV.

HAVING finished your objections to the genuineness of the books of Moses, you proceed to your remarks on the book of Joshua ; and from its internal evidence you endeavor to prove, that this book was not written by Joshua. What then ? what is your conclusion ? " that it is anonymous and without authority." Stop a little ; your conclusion is not connected with your premises ; your friend Euclid would have been ashamed of it. " Anonymous, and therefore without authority ?" I have noticed this solecism before ; but as you frequently bring it forward, and, indeed, your book stands much in need of it, I will submit to your consideration another observation on the subject—the book called *Fleta* is anonymous, but it is not on that account without authority. *Domesday book* is anonymous, and was written above seven hundred years ago ; yet our courts of law do not hold it to be without authority, as to the matters of fact related in it. Yes, you will say, but this book has been preserved with singular care amongst the records of the nation. And who told you that the Jews had no records, or that they did not preserve them with singular care ? Josephus says the contrary : and, in the

Bible itself, an appeal is made to many books which have perished; such as the books of Jasher, the book of Nathan, of Abijah, of Iddo, of Jehu, of natural history by Solomon, of the acts of Manasseh, and others which might be mentioned. If any one having access to the journals of the lords and commons, to the books of the treasury, war office, privy council, and other public documents, should at this day write a history of the reigns of George the First and Second, and should publish it without his name, would any man, three or four hundreds or thousands of years hence, question the authority of that book, when he knew that the whole British nation had received it as an authentic book from the time of its first publication to the age in which he lived? This supposition is in point. The books of the Old Testament were composed from the records of the Jewish nation, and they have been received as true by that nation, from the time in which they were written to the present day. Dodsley's Annual Register is an anonymous book, we only know the name of its editor; the New Annual Register is an anonymous book; the Reviews are anonymous books; but do we, or will our posterity, esteem these books as of no authority? On the contrary, they are admitted at present, and will be received in after ages, as authoritative records of the civil, military, and literary history of England and of Europe. So little foundation is there for our being startled by your assertion, "it is anonymous and without authority."

If I am right in this reasoning (and I protest to you that I do not see any error in it), all the arguments you adduce in proof that the book of Joshua was not written by Joshua, nor that of Samuel by Samuel, are nothing to the purpose for which you have brought them forward: these books may be books of authority, though all you advance against the genuineness of them should be granted. No article of faith is injured by allowing, that there is no such positive proof, when or by whom these, and some other books of Holy Scripture were written, as to exclude all possibility of doubt and cavil. There is no necessity, indeed, to allow this. The chronological and historical difficulties, which others before you have produced, have been answered, and, as to the greatest part of them, so well answered, that I will not waste the reader's time by entering into a particular examination of them.

You make yourself merry with what you call the tale of the sun standing still upon mount Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; and you say, that "the story detects itself, because there is not a nation in the world that knows any thing about it." How can you expect that there should, when there is not a nation in the world whose annals reach this era by many hundred years? It happens, however, that you are probably mistaken as to the fact: a confused tradition concerning this miracle, and a similar one in the time of Ahaz, when the sun went back ten degrees, has been preserved amongst one of the most ancient nations, as we are informed by one of the most ancient historians. Herodotus, in his Euterpe, speaking of the Egyptian priests, says, "they told me, that the sun had four times deviated from his course, having twice risen where



he uniformly goes down, and twice gone down where he uniformly rises. This, however, had produced no alteration in the climate of Egypt; the fruits of the earth, and the phenomena of the Nile, had always been the same." (Beloe's Trans.) The last part of this observation confirms the conjecture, that this account of the Egyptian priests had a reference to the two miracles respecting the sun mentioned in Scripture; for they were not of that kind, which could introduce any change in climates or seasons. You would have been contented to admit the account of this miracle as a fine piece of poetical imagery; you may have seen some Jewish doctors, and some Christian commentators who consider it as such, but improperly, in my opinion. I think it idle, at least, if not impious, to undertake to explain how the miracle was performed; but one, who is not able to explain the mode of doing a thing, argues ill if he thence infers that the thing was not done. We are perfectly ignorant how the sun was formed, how the planets were projected at the creation, how they are still retained in their orbits by the power of gravity; but we admit, notwithstanding, that the sun was formed, that the planets were then projected, and that they are still retained in their orbits. The machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or of the whole of it, with less trouble, and less danger of injuring it, than you can stop your watch. In testimony of the reality of the miracle, the author of the book says, "is not this written in the book of Jasher?" No author in his senses would have appealed, in proof of his veracity, to a book which did not exist, or in attestation of a fact, which, though it did exist, was not recorded in it; we may safely, therefore, conclude, that at the time the book of Joshua was written, there was such a book as the book of Jasher, and that the miracle of the sun's standing still was recorded in that book. But this observation, you will say, does not prove the fact of the sun having stood still; I have not produced it as a proof of that fact; but it proves, that the author of the book of Joshua believed the fact, and that the people of Israel admitted the authority of the book of Jasher. An appeal to a fabulous book would have been as senseless an insult upon their understanding, as it would have been upon ours, had Rapin appealed to the Arabian Nights' Entertainments as a proof of the battle of Hastings.

I cannot attribute much weight to your argument against the genuineness of the book of Joshua, from its being said, that "Joshua burned Ai, and made it a heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day." Joshua lived twenty-four years after the burning of Ai; and if he wrote his history in the latter part of his life, what absurdity is there in saying Ai is still in ruins, or Ai is in ruins to this very day? A young man, who had seen the heads of the rebels in 1745, when they were first stuck upon poles at Temple Bar, might, twenty years afterwards, in attestation of his veracity in speaking of the fact, have justly said, and they are there to this very day. Whoever wrote the Gospel of St. Matthew, it was written not many centuries, probably (I had almost said certainly) not a quarter of one century

after the death of Jesus; yet the author, speaking of the potter's field, which had been purchased by the chief priests with the money they had given Judas to betray his master, says, that it was therefore called the field of blood unto this day; and in another place he says, that the story of the body of Jesus being stolen out of the sepulchre was commonly reported among the Jews until this day. Moses, in his old age, had made use of a similar expression, when he put the Israelites in mind of what the Lord had done to the Egyptians in the Red Sea, "the Lord has destroyed them unto this day." (Deut. xi. 4.)

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua it is related, that Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel to Shechem; and there, in the presence of the elders and principal men of Israel, he recapitulated, in a short speech, all that God had done for their nation, from the calling of Abraham to that time when they were settled in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. In finishing his speech, he said to them, "Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other Gods." Joshua urged farther, that God would not suffer them to worship other gods in fellowship with him; they answered, that "they would serve the Lord." Joshua then said to them, "ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses." Here was a solemn covenant between Joshua on the part of the Lord, and all the men of Israel on their own part. The text then says, "so Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem, and Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God." Here is a proof of two things; first, that there was then, a few years after the death of Moses, existing a book called the Book of the Law of God; the same, without doubt, which Moses had written, and committed to the custody of the Levites, that it might be kept in the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it might be a witness against them; secondly, that Joshua wrote a part at least of his own transactions in that very book, as an addition to it. It is not a proof that he wrote all his own transactions in any book; but I submit entirely to the judgment of every candid man, whether this proof of his having recorded a very material transaction, does not make it probable that he recorded other material transactions; that he wrote the chief part of the book of Joshua; and that such things as happened after his death have been inserted in it by others in order to render the history more complete.

The book of Joshua, chap. vi, ver. 26, is quoted in the first book of Kings, chap. xvi, ver. 34. "In his (Ahab's) days did Hiel, the Bethelite, build Jericho: he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram, his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son, Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by

Joshua, the son of Nun." Here is a proof that the book of Joshua is older than the first book of Kings: but that is not all which may reasonably be inferred, I do not say proved, from this quotation. It may be inferred from the phrase, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun, that Joshua *wrote down* the word which the Lord had spoken. In Baruch (which, though an apocryphal book, is authority for this purpose) there is a similar phrase, as thou spakest by thy servant Moses, in the day when thou didst command him *to write thy law*.

I think it unnecessary to make any observation on what you say relative to the book of Judges; but I cannot pass unnoticed your censure of the book of Ruth, which you call "an idle bungling story, foolishly told, no body knows by whom, about a strolling country girl creeping slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz; pretty stuff, indeed," you exclaim, "to be called the word of God!" It seems to me, that you do not perfectly comprehend what is meant by the expression, the word of God, or the divine authority of the Scriptures: I will explain it to you in the words of Dr. Law, late bishop of Carlisle, and in those of St. Austin. My first quotation is from bishop Law's *Theory of Religion*, a book not undeserving your notice. "The true sense, then, of the divine authority of the books of the Old Testament, and which, perhaps, is enough to denominate them in general divinely inspired, seems to be this; that as in those times God has all along, beside the inspection, or superintendency of his general providence, interfered upon particular occasions, by giving express commissions to some persons (thence called prophets) to declare his will in various manners and degrees of evidence, as best suited the occasion, time, and nature of the subject; and in all other cases left them wholly to themselves: in like manner he has interposed his more immediate assistance (and notified it to them, as they did to the world) in the recording of these revelations; so far as that was necessary, amidst the common (but from hence termed sacred) history of those times, and mixed with various other occurrences, in which the historian's own natural qualifications were sufficient to enable him to relate things with all the accuracy they required." The passage from St. Austin is this, "I am of opinion, that those men, to whom the Holy Ghost revealed what ought to be received as authoritative in religion, might write some things as men with historical diligence, and other things as prophets by divine inspiration; and that these things are so distinct, that the former may be attributed to themselves, as contributing to the increase of knowledge, and the latter to God speaking by them things appertaining to the authority of religion." Whether this opinion be right or wrong, I do not here inquire; it is the opinion of many learned men and good Christians: and, if you will adopt it as your opinion, you will see cause, perhaps, to become a Christian yourself; you will see cause to consider chronological, geographical, or genealogical errors, apparent mistakes or real contradictions as to historical facts; needless repetitions and trifling interpolations; indeed, you will see cause to consider all the principal objections of your book to be ab-

solutely without foundation. Receive but the Bible as composed by upright and well-informed, though, in some points, fallible men (for I exclude all fallibility when they profess to deliver the word of God), and you must receive it as a book revealing to you, in many parts, the express will of God; and in other parts, relating to you the ordinary history of the times. Give but the authors of the Bible that credit which you give to our historians; believe them to deliver the word of God, when they tell you that they do so; believe, when they relate other things as of themselves and not of the Lord, that they wrote to the best of their knowledge and capacity, and you will be in your belief something very different from a deist: you may not be allowed to aspire to the character of an orthodox believer, but you will not be an unbeliever in the divine authority of the Bible; though you should admit human mistakes and human opinions to exist in some parts of it. This I take to be the first step towards the removal of the doubts of many sceptical men; and when they are advanced thus far, the grace of God, assisting a teachable disposition, and a pious intention, may carry them on to perfection.

As to Ruth, you do an injury to her character. She was not a strolling country girl. She had been married ten years; and being left a widow without children, she accompanied her mother-in-law, returning into her native country; out of which, with her husband and her two sons, she had been driven by a famine. The disturbances in France have driven many men with their families to America. If, ten years hence, a woman, having lost her husband and her children, should return to France with a daughter-in-law, would you be justified in calling the daughter-in-law a strolling country girl? "But she crept slyly to bed to her cousin Boaz." I do not find it so in the history: as a person imploring protection, she laid herself down at the foot of an aged kinsman's bed, and she rose up with as much innocence as she had laid herself down. She was afterwards married to Boaz, and reputed by all her neighbors a virtuous woman; and they were more likely to know her character than you are. Whoever reads the book of Ruth, bearing in mind the simplicity of ancient manners, will find it an interesting story of a poor young woman, following in a strange land the advice, and affectionately attaching herself to the fortunes of the mother of her deceased husband.

The two books of Samuel come next under your review. You proceed to show, that these books were not written by Samuel, that they are anonymous, and thence you conclude without authority. I need not here repeat what I have said upon the fallacy of your conclusion; and as to your proving that the books were not written by Samuel, you might have spared yourself some trouble if you had recollected, that it is generally admitted, that Samuel did not write any part of the second book which bears his name, and only a part of the first. It would, indeed, have been an inquiry not undeserving your notice, in many parts of your work, to have examined what was the opinion of learned men respecting the authors of the

several books of the Bible ; you would have found, that you were in many places fighting a phantom of your own raising, and proving what was generally admitted. Very little, certainly, I think, can at this time be obtained on this subject ; but that you may have some knowledge of what has been conjectured by men of judgment, I will quote to you a passage from Dr. Hartley's *Observations on Man*. The author himself does not vouch for the truth of his observation, for he begins it with a supposition. "I suppose, then, that the Pentateuch consists of the writings of Moses, put together by Samuel, with a very few additions ; that the books of Joshua and Judges were, in like manner, collected by him ; and the book of Ruth, with the first part of the first book of Samuel, written by him ; that the latter part of the first book of Samuel, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded Samuel, suppose Nathan and Gad ; that the books of Kings and Chronicles are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets, concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by Ezra ; that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are collections of like records, some written by Ezra and Nehemiah, and some by their predecessors ; that the book of Esther was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transactions there recorded, perhaps Mordecai ; the book of Job by a Jew, of an uncertain time ; the Psalms by David and other pious persons ; the books of Proverbs and Canticles by Solomon ; the book of Ecclesiastes by Solomon, or perhaps by a Jew of later times, speaking in his person, but not with an intention to make him pass for the author ; the prophecies by the prophets whose names they bear ; and the books of the New Testament by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed." I have produced this passage to you not merely to show you, that, in a great part of your work, you are attacking what no person is interested in defending ; but to convince you, that a wise and good man, and a firm believer in revealed religion, for such was Dr. Hartley, and no priest, did not reject the anonymous books of the Old Testament as books without authority. I shall not trouble either you or myself with any more observations on that head ; you may ascribe the two books of Kings, and the two books of Chronicles, to what authors you please ; I am satisfied with knowing, that the annals of the Jewish nation were written in the time of Samuel, and, probably, in all succeeding times, by men of ability, who lived in or near the times of which they write. Of the truth of this observation we have abundant proof, not only from the testimony of Josephus, and of the writers of the Talmuds, but from the Old Testament itself. I will content myself with citing a few places : "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, and in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer." 1 Chron. xxix, 29. "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer?" 2 Chron. ix, 29. "Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, are they not written in the book of

Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer, concerning genealogies?" 2 Chron. xii. 15. "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani." 2 Chron. xx. 34. Is it possible for writers to give a stronger evidence of their veracity, than by referring their readers to the books from which they had extracted the materials of their history?

"The two books of Kings," you say, "are little more than a history of assassinations, treachery, and war." That the kings of Israel and Judah were many of them very wicked persons is evident from the history which is given of them in the Bible; but it ought to be remembered, that their wickedness is not to be attributed to their religion; nor were the people of Israel chosen to be the people of God, on account of their wickedness; nor was their being chosen a cause of it. One may wonder, indeed, that, having experienced so many singular marks of God's goodness towards their nation, they did not at once become, and continue to be (what, however, they have long been), strenuous advocates for the worship of one only God, the maker of heaven and earth. This was the purpose for which they were chosen, and this purpose has been accomplished. For above three and twenty hundred years the Jews have uniformly witnessed to all the nations of the earth, the unity of God, and his abomination of idolatry. But as you look upon "the appellation of the Jews being God's holy people as a lie, which the priests and leaders of the Jews had invented to cover the baseness of their own characters, and which Christian priests, sometimes as corrupt, and often as cruel, have professed to believe," I will plainly state to you the reasons which induce me to believe that it is no lie, and I hope they will be such reasons as you will not attribute either to cruelty or corruption.

To any one contemplating the universality of things, and the fabric of nature, this globe of earth, with the men dwelling on its surface, will not appear (exclusive of the divinity of their souls) of more importance than a hillock of ants; all of which, some with corn, some with eggs, some without any thing, run hither and thither, bustling about a little heap of dust. This is a thought of the immortal Bacon; and it is admirably fitted to humble the pride of philosophy, attempting to prescribe forms to the proceedings, and bounds to the attributes of God. We may as easily circumscribe infinity, as penetrate the secret purposes of the Almighty. There are but two ways by which I can acquire any knowledge of the nature of the Supreme Being, by reason, and by revelation; to you, who reject revelation, there is but one. Now my reason informs me, that God has made a great difference between the kinds of animals, with respect to their capacity of enjoying happiness. Every kind is perfect in its order; but if we compare different kinds together, one will appear to be greatly superior to another. An animal, which has but one sense, has but one source of happiness; but if it be supplied with what is suited to that sense, it enjoys all the happiness of which it is capable, and is in its nature perfect. Other

sorts of animals, which have two or three senses, and which have also abundant means of gratifying them, enjoy twice or thrice as much happiness as those do which have but one. In the same sort of animals there is a great difference amongst individuals, one having the senses more perfect, and the body less subject to disease, than another. Hence, if I were to form a judgment of the Divine goodness by this use of my reason, I could not but say that it was partial and unequal. "What shall we say then? is God unjust? God forbid?" His goodness may be unequal, without being imperfect; it must be estimated from the whole, and not from a part. Every order of beings is so sufficient for its own happiness, and so conducive, at the same time, to the happiness of every other, that in one view it seems to be made for itself alone, and in another, not for itself but for every other. Could we comprehend the whole of the immense fabric which God hath formed, I am persuaded, that we should see nothing but perfection, harmony, and beauty, in every part of it; but whilst we dispute about parts, we neglect the whole, and discern nothing but supposed anomalies and defects. The maker of a watch, or the builder of a ship, is not to be blamed because a spectator cannot discover either the beauty or the use of disjointed parts. And shall we dare to accuse God of injustice, for not having distributed the gifts of nature in the same degree to all kinds of animals, when it is probable that this very inequality of distribution may be the mean of producing the greatest sum-total of happiness to the whole system? In exactly the same manner may we reason concerning the acts of God's especial providence. If we consider any one act, such as that of appointing the Jews to be his peculiar people, as unconnected with every other, it may appear to be a partial display of his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning the wisdom or the benignity of his divine nature. But if we connect the history of the Jews with that of other nations, from the most remote antiquity to the present time, we shall discover, that they were not chosen so much for their own benefit, or on account of their own merit, as for the general benefit of mankind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Grecians, Romans, to all the people of the earth, they were formerly, and they are still to all civilized nations, a beacon set upon a hill, to warn them from idolatry, to light them to the sanctuary of a God holy, just, and good. Why should we suspect such a dispensation of being a *lie*? when even from the little which we can understand of it, we see that it is founded in wisdom, carried on for the general good, and analogous to all that reason teaches us concerning the nature of God.

Several things, you observe, are mentioned in the book of the Kings, such as the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, the ascent of Elijah into heaven, the destruction of the children who mocked Elisha, and the resurrection of a dead man: these circumstances being mentioned in the book of Kings, and not mentioned in that of Chronicles, is a proof to you that they are lies. I esteem it a very erroneous mode of reasoning, which, from the silence of one author concerning a particular circumstance, infers the want of ve-

racity in another who mentions it. And this observation is still more cogent, when applied to a book which is only a supplement to, or an abridgment of, other books; and under this description the book of Chronicles has been considered by all writers. But though you will not believe the miracle of the drying up of Jeroboam's hand, what can you say to the prophecy which was then delivered concerning the future destruction of the idolatrous altar of Jeroboam? The prophecy is thus written, 1 Kings xiii. 2, "Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee (the altar) shall he offer the priests of the high places." Here is a clear prophecy; the name, family, and office of a particular person are described in the year 975 (according to the Bible chronology) before Christ. Above 350 years after the delivery of the prophecy, you will find, by consulting the second book of Kings (chap. xxiii. 15, 16), this prophecy fulfilled in all its parts.

You make a calculation, that Genesis was not written till eight hundred years after Moses, and that it is of the same age, and you may probably think, of the same authority as *Æsop's Fables*. You give, what you call the evidence of this, the air of a demonstration. "It has but two stages: first, the account of the kings of Edom, mentioned in Genesis, is taken from Chronicles; and, therefore, the book of Genesis was written after the book of Chronicles. Secondly, the book of Chronicles was not begun to be written till after Zedekiah, in whose time Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, five hundred and eighty-eight years before Christ, and more than eight hundred and sixty after Moses." Having answered this objection before, I might be excused taking any more notice of it; but as you build much, in this place, upon the strength of your argument, I will show you its weakness, when it is properly stated. A few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses; therefore, no part of Genesis could be written by Moses;—a child would deny your *therefore*. Again: a few verses in the book of Genesis could not be written by Moses, because they speak of kings of Israel, there having been no kings of Israel in the time of Moses; and, therefore, they could not be written by Samuel, or by Solomon, or by any other persons who lived after there were kings in Israel, except by the author of the book of Chronicles; this is also an illegitimate inference from your position. Again: a few verses in the book of Genesis are, word for word, the same as a few verses in the book of Chronicles; therefore, the author of the book of Genesis must have taken them from Chronicles;—another lame conclusion. Why might not the author of the book of Chronicles have taken them from Genesis, as he has taken many other genealogies, supposing them to have been inserted in Genesis by Samuel? But where, you may ask, could Samuel, or any other person, have found the account of the kings of Edom? Probably, in the public records of the nation, which were certainly as open for inspection to Samuel, and the other prophets, as they were to the author of Chronicles. I hold it needless to employ more time on the subject:



## LETTER V.

At length you come to two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, which you allow to be genuine books, giving an account of the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, about five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ; but then you say, "Those accounts are nothing to us, nor to any other persons, unless it be to the Jews, as a part of the history of their nation; and there is just as much of the word of God in those books, as there is in any of the histories of France, or in Rapin's History of England." Here let us stop a moment, and try, if from your own concessions it be not possible to confute your argument. Ezra and Nehemiah, you grant, are genuine books, "but they are nothing to us!" The very first verse of Ezra says, the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled; is it nothing to us to know that Jeremiah was a true prophet? Do but grant that the Supreme Being communicated to any of the sons of men a knowledge of future events, so that their predictions were plainly verified, and you will find little difficulty in admitting the truth of revealed religion. Is it nothing to us to know, that, five hundred and thirty-six years before Christ, the books of Chronicles, Kings, Judges, Joshua, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, Genesis, every book the authority of which you have attacked, are all referred to by Ezra and Nehemiah, as authentic books, containing the history of the Israelitish nation from Abraham to that very time? Is it nothing to us to know that the history of the Jews is true? It is every thing to us; for if that history be not true, Christianity must be false. The Jews are the root, we are the branches "grafted in amongst them;" to them pertain "the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen."

The history of the Old Testament has, without doubt, some difficulties in it; but a minute philosopher, who busies himself in searching them out, whilst he neglects to contemplate the harmony of all its parts, the wisdom and goodness of God displayed throughout the whole, appears to me to be like a purblind man, who, in surveying a picture, objects to the simplicity of the design, and the beauty of the execution, from the asperities he has discovered in the canvas and the coloring. The history of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the real difficulties which occur in it, notwithstanding the scoffs and cavils of unbelievers, appears to me to have such internal evidences of its truth, to be so corroborated by the most ancient profane histories, so confirmed by the present circumstances of the world, that if I were not a Christian, I would become a Jew. You think this history to be a collection of lies, contradictions, blasphemies; I look upon it to be the oldest, the truest, the most comprehensive, and the most important history in the world. I consider it as giving more satisfactory proofs of the being and attributes of

God, of the origin and end of human kind, than ever were attained by the deepest researches of the most enlightened philosophers. The exercise of our reason in the investigation of truths respecting the nature of God, and the future expectations of human kind, is highly useful; but I hope I shall be pardoned by the metaphysicians in saying, that the chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this, that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties. I do not presume to measure other men by my standard; you may have clearer notions than I am able to form of the infinity of space; of the eternity of duration; of necessary existence; of the connexion between necessary existence and intelligence; between intelligence and benevolence: you may see nothing in the universe but organized matter; or, rejecting a material, you may see nothing but an ideal world. With a mind weary of conjecture, fatigued by doubt, sick of disputation, eager for knowledge, anxious for certainty, and unable to attain it by the best use of my reason in matters of the utmost importance, I have long ago turned my thoughts to an impartial examination of the proofs on which revealed religion is grounded, and I am convinced of its truth. This examination is a subject within the reach of human capacity; you have come to one conclusion respecting it, I have come to another; both of us cannot be right; may God forgive him that is in an error!

You ridicule, in a note, the story of an angel appearing to Joshua. Your mirth you will perceive to be misplaced, when you consider the design of this appearance: it was to assure Joshua, that the same God who had appeared to Moses, ordering him to pull off his shoes, because he stood on holy ground, had now appeared to himself. Was this no encouragement to a man who was about to engage in war with many nations? Had it no tendency to confirm his faith? Was it no lesson to him to obey, in all things, the commands of God, and to give the glory of his conquests to the author of them, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? As to your wit about pulling off the shoe, it originates, I think, in your ignorance; you ought to have known, that this rite was an indication of reverence for the Divine presence; and that the custom of entering barefoot into their temples subsists, in some countries, to this day.

You allow the book of Ezra to be a genuine book; but, that the author of it may not escape without a blow, you say, that in matters of record it is not to be depended on; and, as a proof of your assertion, you tell us, that the total amount of the numbers who returned from Babylon does not correspond with the particulars; and, that every child may have an argument for its infidelity, you display the particulars, and show your own skill in arithmetic, by summing them up. And can you suppose that Ezra, a man of great learning, knew so little of science, so little of the lowest branch of science, that he could not give his readers the sum-total of sixty particular sums? You know, undoubtedly, that the Hebrew letters denoted also numbers; and that there was such a great similarity between some of these letters, that it was extremely easy for a tran-

scriber of a manuscript to mistake a *beth* for a *caph*\* (or 2 for 20), a *gimel* for a *nun*† (or 3 for 50), a *daleth* for a *resch*‡ (or 5 for 200.) Now what have we to do with numerical contradictions in the Bible, but to attribute them, wherever they occur, to this obvious source of error; the inattention of the transcriber in writing one letter for another that was like it?

I should extend these Letters to a length troublesome to the reader, to you, and to myself, if I answered minutely every objection you have made, and rectified every error into which you have fallen; it may be sufficient briefly to notice some of the chief. The character represented in Job under the name of Satan is, you say, "the first and the only-time this name is mentioned in the Bible." Now I find this name, as denoting an enemy, frequently occurring in the Old Testament; thus 2 Sam. xix. 22, "What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me?" In the original it is *satans* unto me. Again, 1 Kings v. 4. "The Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent"—in the original, neither *satan* nor evil. I need not mention other places; these are sufficient to show, that the word *satan*, denoting an adversary, does occur in various places of the Old Testament; and it is extremely probable to me, that the root *satan* was introduced into the Hebrew and other eastern languages, to denote an adversary, from its having been the proper name of the great enemy of mankind. I know it is an opinion of Voltaire, that the word *satan* is not older than the Babylonian captivity; this is a mistake, for it is met with in the hundred and ninth Psalm, which all allow to have been written by David, long before the captivity. Now we are upon this subject, permit me to recommend to your consideration the universality of the doctrine concerning an evil being, who in the beginning of time had opposed himself, who still continues to oppose himself, to the supreme source of all good. Amongst all nations, in all ages, this opinion prevailed, that human affairs were subject to the will of the gods, and regulated by their interposition. Hence has been derived whatever we have read of the wandering stars of the Chaldeans, two of them beneficent, and two malignant; hence the Egyptian Typho and Osiris; the Persian Arimanius and Oromasdes; the Grecian celestial and infernal Jove; the Brama and the Zupay of the Indians, Peruvians, and Mexicans; the good and evil principle, by whatever names they may be called, of all other barbarous nations; and hence the structure of the whole book of Job, in whatever light, of history or drama, it may be considered. Now does it not appear reasonable to suppose, that an opinion so ancient and universal has arisen from tradition concerning the fall of our first parents; disfigured, indeed, and obscured, as all traditions must be, by many fabulous additions?

The Jews, you tell us, "never prayed but when they were in trouble." I do not believe this of the Jews; but that they prayed

more fervently when they were in trouble than at other times, may be true of the Jews, and I apprehend is true of all nations and all individuals. But "the Jews never prayed for any thing but victory, vengeance, and riches." Read Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and blush for your assertion, illiberal and uncharitable in the extreme!

It appears, you observe, "to have been the custom of the heathens to personify both virtue and vice, by statues and images, as is done now-a-days, both by statuary and by painting; but it does not follow from this that they worshipped them any more than we do." Not worshipped them! What think you of the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up? Was it not worshipped by the princes, the rulers, the judges, the people, the nations, and the languages of the Babylonian empire? Not worshipped them! What think you of the decree of the Roman senate for fetching the statue of the mother of the gods from Pessinum? Was it only that they might admire it as a piece of workmanship? Not worshipped them! "What man is there, that knoweth not, how that the city of the Ephesians was a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" Not worshipped them! The worship was universal. "Every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made; the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, and the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in fire to Adrammelech, and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim." (2 Kings, chap. xvii.) The heathens are much indebted to you for this your curious apology for their idolatry; for a mode of worship the most cruel, senseless, impure, abominable, that can possibly disgrace the faculties of the human mind. Had this your conceit occurred in ancient times, it might have saved Micah's teraphims, the golden calves of Jeroboam and of Aaron, and quite superseded the necessity of the second commandment!!! Heathen morality has had its advocates before you; the facetious gentleman who pulled off his hat to the statue of Jupiter, that he might have a friend when heathen idolatry should again be in repute, seems to have had some foundation for his improper humor, some knowledge, that certain men, esteeming themselves great philosophers, had entered into a conspiracy to abolish Christianity, some foresight of the consequences which will certainly attend their success.

It is an error, you say, to call the Psalms—the Psalms of David. This error was observed by St. Jerome, many hundred years before you were born; his words are: "We know that they are in an error who attribute all the Psalms to David." You, I suppose, will not deny, that David wrote some of them. Songs are of various sorts; we have hunting songs, drinking songs, fighting songs, love songs, foolish, wanton, wicked songs. If you will have the "Psalms of David to be nothing but a collection from different song-writers," you must allow that the writers of them were inspired by no ordi-

nary spirit; that it is a collection, incapable of being degraded by the name you give it; that it greatly excels every other collection, in matter and in manner. Compare the book of Psalms with the odes of Horace or Anacreon, with the hymns of Callimachus, the golden verses of Pythagoras, the choruses of the Greek tragedians (no contemptible compositions any of these), and you will quickly see how greatly it surpasses them all, in piety of sentiment, in sublimity of expression, in purity of morality, and in rational theology.

As you esteem the Psalms of David a song-book, it is consistent enough in you to esteem the Proverbs of Solomon a jest-book; there have not come down to us above eight hundred of his jests; if we had the whole three thousand, which he wrote, our mirth would be extreme. Let us open the book, and see what kind of jests it contains; take the very first as a specimen: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Do you perceive any jest in this? The fear of the Lord! What Lord does Solomon mean? He means that Lord, who took the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people; who redeemed that people from Egyptian bondage by a miraculous interposition of his power; who gave the law to Moses; who commanded the Israelites to exterminate the nations of Canaan. Now this Lord you will not fear; the jest says, you despise wisdom and instruction. Let us try again: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." If your heart has been ever touched by parental feelings, you will see no jest in this. Once more: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." These are the three first proverbs in Solomon's "jest-book;" if you read it through, it may not make you merry; I hope it will make you wise; that it will teach you, at least, the beginning of wisdom; the fear of that Lord whom Solomon feared. Solomon, you tell us, was witty; jesters are sometimes witty; but though all the world, from the time of the queen of Sheba, has heard of the wisdom of Solomon, his wit was never heard of before. There is a great difference, Mr. Locke teaches us, between wit and judgment, and there is a greater between wit and wisdom. Solomon "was wiser than Ethan the Ezahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men you may think were jesters; and so may you call the seven wise men of Greece: but you will never convince the world, that Solomon, who was wiser than them all, was nothing but a witty jester. As to the sins and debaucheries of Solomon, we have nothing to do with them but to avoid them; and to give full credit to his experience, when he preaches to us his admirable sermon on the vanity of every thing but piety and virtue.

Isaiah has a greater share of your abuse than any other writer in the Old Testament, and the reason of it is obvious: the prophecies of Isaiah have received such a full and circumstantial completion, that, unless you can persuade yourself to consider the whole book (a few historical sketches excepted) "as one continued bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning," you must of necessity allow its divine au-

thority. You compare the burthen of Babylon, the burthen of Moab, the burthen of Damascus, and the other denunciations of the prophet against cities and kingdoms, to the story "of the Knight of the Burning Mountain, the story of Cinderella," &c. I may have read these stories, but I remember nothing of the subjects of them; I have read also Isaiah's burthen of Babylon, and I have compared it with the past and present state of Babylon, and the comparison has made such an impression on my mind, that it will never be effaced from my memory. I shall never cease to believe, that the Eternal alone, by whom things future are more distinctly known than past or present things are by man, that the eternal God alone could have dictated to the prophet Isaiah the subject of the burthen of Babylon.

The latter part of the forty-fourth, and the beginning of the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, are, in your opinion, so far from being written by Isaiah, that they could only have been written by some person who lived at least a hundred and fifty years after Isaiah was dead. These chapters, you go on, "are a compliment to Cyrus, who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity above one hundred and fifty years after the death of Isaiah:" and is it for this, Sir, that you accuse the church of audacity and the priests of ignorance, in imposing, as you call it, this book upon the world as the writing of Isaiah? What shall be said of you, who, either designedly or ignorantly, represent one of the most clear and important prophecies in the Bible, as an historical compliment, written above an hundred and fifty years after the death of the prophet? We contend, Sir, that this is a prophecy, and not a history; that God called Cyrus by his name, declared that he should conquer Babylon, and described the means by which he should do it, above an hundred years before Cyrus was born, and when there was no probability of such an event. Porphyry could not resist the evidence of Daniel's prophecies, but by saying that they were forged after the events predicted had taken place; Voltaire could not resist the evidence of the prediction of Jesus, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but by saying, that the account was written after Jerusalem had been destroyed; and you, at length (though for aught I know, you may have had predecessors in this presumption), unable to resist the evidence of Isaiah's prophecies, contend, that they are bombastical rant, without application, though the application is circumstantial; and destitute of meaning, though the meaning is so obvious that it cannot be mistaken; and that one of the most remarkable of them is not a prophecy, but an historical compliment written after the event. We will not, Sir, give up Daniel and St. Matthew to the impudent assertions of Porphyry and Voltaire, nor will we give up Isaiah to your assertion. Proof, proof is what we require, and not assertion; we will not relinquish our religion in obedience to your abusive assertion respecting the prophets of God. That the wonderful absurdity of this hypothesis may be more obvious to you, I beg you to consider, that Cyrus was a Persian, had been brought up in the religion of his

country, and was probably addicted to the magian superstition of two independent beings, equal in power, but different in principle, one the author of light and of all good, the other the author of darkness and all evil. Now is it probable, that a captive Jew, meaning to compliment the greatest prince in the world, should be so stupid as to tell the prince that his religion was a lie? "I am the Lord, and there is none else, I form the *light*, and create *darkness*, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things."

But if you will persevere in believing that the prophecy concerning Cyrus was written after the event, peruse the burthen of Babylon; was that also written after the event? Were the Medes then stirred up against Babylon? Was Babylon, the glory of the kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees, then overthrown, and become as Sodom and Gomorrah? Was it then uninhabited? Was it then neither fit for the Arabian's tent nor the shepherd's fold? Did the wild beasts of the desert then lie there? Did the wild beasts of the islands then cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces? Were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the son and the grandson, then cut off? Was Babylon then become a possession of the bittern, and pools of water? Was it then swept with the besom of destruction, so swept that the world knows not now where to find it?

I am unwilling to attribute bad designs, deliberate wickedness, to you or to any man; I cannot avoid believing that you think you have truth on your side, and that you are doing service to mankind in endeavoring to root out what you esteem superstition. What I blame you for is this: that you have attempted to lessen the authority of the Bible by ridicule, more than by reason; that you have brought forward every petty objection which your ingenuity could discover, or your industry pick up, from the writings of others; and, without taking any notice of the answers which have been repeatedly given to these objections, you urge and enforce them as if they were new. There is certainly some novelty, at least, in your manner, for you go beyond all others in boldness of assertion, and in profaneness of argumentation; Bolingbroke and Voltaire must yield the palm of scurrility to Thomas Paine.

Permit me to state to you what would, in my opinion, have been a better mode of proceeding; better suited to the character of an honest man, sincere in his endeavors to search out truth. Such a man, in reading the Bible, would, in the first place, examine whether the Bible attributed to the Supreme Being any attributes repugnant to holiness, truth, justice, goodness; whether it represented him as subject to human infirmities; whether it excluded him from the government of the world, or assigned the origin of it to chance, and an eternal conflict of atoms. Finding nothing of this kind in the Bible (for the destruction of the Canaanites by his express command I have shown not to be repugnant to his moral justice), he would, in the second place, consider, that the Bible being, as to many of its parts, a very old book, and written by vari-

ous authors, and at different and distant periods, there might, probably, occur some difficulties and apparent contradictions in the historical part of it; he would endeavor to remove these difficulties, to reconcile these apparent contradictions, by the rules of such sound criticism as he would use in examining the contents of any other book; and if he found that most of them were of a trifling nature, arising from short additions inserted into the text as explanatory and supplemental, or from mistakes and omissions of transcribers, he would infer, that all the rest were capable of being accounted for, though he was not able to do it; and he would be the more willing to make this concession, from observing, that there ran through the whole book a harmony and connexion, utterly inconsistent with every idea of forgery and deceit. He would then, in the third place, observe, that the miraculous and historical parts of this book were so intermixed, that they could not be separated; that they must either both be true, or both false; and from finding that the historical part was as well or better authenticated than that of any other history, he would admit the miraculous part; and to confirm himself in this belief, he would advert to the prophecies; well knowing, that the prediction of things to come was as certain a proof of the Divine interposition, as the performance of a miracle could be. If he should find, as he certainly would, that many ancient prophecies had been fulfilled in all their circumstances, and that some were fulfilling at this very day, he would not suffer a few seeming or real difficulties to overbalance the weight of this accumulated evidence for the truth of the Bible. Such, I presume to think, would be a proper conduct in all those who are desirous of forming a rational and impartial judgment on the subject of revealed religion. To return:

As to your observation, that the book of Isaiah is (at least in translation) that kind of composition and false taste, which is properly called prose run mad; I have only to remark, that your taste for Hebrew poetry, even judging of it from translation, would be more correct if you would suffer yourself to be informed on the subject by Bishop Lowth, who tells you, in his *Prelections*, "that a poem translated literally from the Hebrew into any other language, whilst the same forms of the sentences remain, will still retain, even as far as relates to versification, much of its native dignity, and a faint appearance of versification." (*Gregory's Translation*). If this is what you mean by prose run mad, your observation may be admitted.

You explain at some length your notion of the misapplication made by St. Matthew of the prophecy in Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son." That passage has been handled largely and minutely by almost every commentator, and it is too important to be handled superficially by any one. I am not on the present occasion concerned to explain it. It is quoted by you to prove, and it is the only instance you produce, that Isaiah was "a lying prophet and an impostor." Now I maintain, that this very instance proves that he was a true prophet, and no impostor. The his-



tory of the prophecy, as delivered in the seventh chapter, is this: Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, made war upon Ahaz, king of Judah; not merely, or perhaps not at all, for the sake of plunder or the conquest of territory, but with a declared purpose of making an entire revolution in the government of Judah, of destroying the royal house of David, and of placing another family on the throne. Their purpose is thus expressed: "Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal." Now what did the Lord commission Isaiah to say to Ahaz? Did he commission him to say, the kings shall not vex thee? No. The kings shall not conquer thee? No. The kings shall not succeed against thee? No. He commissioned him to say: "It (the purpose of the two kings) shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass;" I demand, did it stand, did it come to pass? Was any revolution effected? Was the royal house of David dethroned and destroyed? Was Tabeal ever made king of Judah? No. The prophecy was perfectly accomplished. You say, "Instead of these two kings failing in their attempt against Ahaz, they succeeded; Ahaz was defeated and destroyed." I deny the fact; Ahaz was defeated, but not destroyed; and even the "two hundred thousand women, and sons, and daughters," whom you represent as carried into captivity, were not carried into captivity; they were made captives, but they were not carried into captivity; for the chief men of Samaria, being admonished by a prophet, would not suffer Pekah to bring the captives into the land; "They rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses (some humanity, you see, amongst those Israelites, whom you everywhere represent as barbarous brutes), and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, to their brethren." (2 Chron. xxviii. 15.) The kings did fail in their attempt; their attempt was to destroy the house of David, and to make a revolution; but they made no revolution, they did not destroy the house of David; for Ahaz slept with his fathers, and Hezekiah, his son, of the house of David, reigned in his stead.

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## LETTER VI.

AFTER what I conceive to be a great misrepresentation of the character and conduct of Jeremiah, you bring forward an objection, which Spinoza and others before you had much insisted upon, though it is an objection which neither affects the genuineness, nor the authenticity, of the book of Jeremiah, any more than the blunder of a bookbinder, in misplacing the sheets of your performance, would lessen its authority. The objection is, that the book of Jeremiah

has been put together in a disordered state. It is acknowledged, that the order of time is not everywhere observed; but the cause of the confusion is not known. Some attribute it to Baruch collecting into one volume all the several prophecies which Jeremiah had written, and neglecting to put them in their proper places. Others think, that the several parts of the work were at first properly arranged, but that through accident, or the carelessness of transcribers, they were deranged. Others contend, that there is no confusion; that prophecy differs from history, in not being subject to an accurate observance of time and order. But leaving this matter to be settled by critical discussion, let us come to a matter of greater importance; to your charge against Jeremiah for his duplicity, and for his false prediction. First, as to his duplicity:

Jeremiah, on account of his having boldly predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, had been thrust into a miry dungeon by the princes of Judah who sought his life; there he would have perished, had not one of the eunuchs taken compassion on him, and petitioned king Zedekiah in his favor, saying, "These men (the princes) have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet (no small testimony this, of the probity of the prophet's character), whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is like to die for hunger." On this representation Jeremiah was taken out of the dungeon by an order from the king, who soon afterwards sent privately for him, and desired him to conceal nothing from him, binding himself by an oath, that, whatever might be the nature of his prophecy, he would not put him to death, or deliver him into the hands of the princes who sought his life. Jeremiah delivered to him the purpose of God respecting the fate of Jerusalem. The conference being ended, the king, anxious to perform his oath, to preserve the life of the prophet, dismissed him, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die. But if the princes hear that I have talked with thee, and they come unto thee, and say unto thee, Declare unto us now what thou hast said unto the king, hide it not from us, and we will not put thee to death; also what the king said unto thee: then thou shalt say unto them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. Then came all the princes unto Jeremiah, and asked him, and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded." Thus, you remark, "this man of God, as he is called, could tell a lie, or very strongly prevaricate; for certainly he did not go to Zedekiah to make his supplication, neither did he make it." It is not said that he told the princes he went to make his supplication, but that he presented it: now it is said in the preceding chapter, that he did make the supplication, and it is probable that in this conference he renewed it; but be that as it may, I contend that Jeremiah was not guilty of duplicity, or, in more intelligible terms, that he did not violate any law of nature, or of civil society, in what he did on this occasion. He told the truth, in part, to save his life; and he was under no obligation to tell the whole to men who were certain-

ly his enemies, and no good subjects to his king. "In a matter (says Puffendorf), which I am not obliged to declare to another, if I cannot, with safety, conceal the whole, I may fairly discover no more than a part." Was Jeremiah under any obligation to declare to the princes what had passed in his conference with the king? You may as well say, that the House of Lords has a right to compel privy counsellors to reveal the king's secrets. The king cannot justly require a privy counsellor to tell a lie for him; but he may require him not to divulge his counsels to those who have no right to know them. Now for the false prediction: I will give the description of it in your own words:

"In the 34th chapter is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Zedekiah, in these words," ver. 2. 'Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and will burn it with fire; and thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but thou shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth, and thou shalt go to Babylon. Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah, king of Judah; thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not die by the sword, but thou shalt die in peace; and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings that were before thee, so shall they burn odors for thee, and will lament thee, saying, Ah, Lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord.'

"Now, instead of Zedekiah beholding the eyes of the king of Babylon, and speaking with him mouth to mouth, and dying in peace, and with the burning of odors, as at the funeral of his fathers (as Jeremiah had declared the Lord himself had pronounced), the reverse, according to the 52d chapter, was the case; it is there stated, verse 10, 'That the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.' What can we say of these prophets, but that they are impostors and liars?" I can say this, that the prophecy you have produced was fulfilled in all its parts: and what then shall be said of those who call Jeremiah a liar and an impostor? Here then we are fairly at issue; you affirm that the prophecy was not fulfilled, and I affirm that it was fulfilled in all its parts. "I will give this city into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "They (the forces of the king of Babylon) burnt the house of God, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.) "Thou shalt not escape out of his hand, but shalt surely be taken, and delivered into his hand:" so says the prophet; what says the history? "The men of war fled by night, and the king went the way towards the plain; and the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army were scattered from him; so they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon, to Riblah." (2 Kings xxv. 5.) The prophet goes on, "Thine eyes shall behold the eyes of the king of

Babylon, and he shall speak with thee mouth to mouth." No pleasant circumstance this to Zedekiah, who had provoked the king of Babylon by revolting from him! The history says, "The king of Babylon gave judgment upon Zedekiah," or, as it is more literally rendered from the Hebrew, "spake judgment with him at Riblah." The prophet concludes this part with, "And thou shalt go to Babylon;" the history says, "The king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death," Jer. lii. 11. "Thou shalt not die by the sword." He did not die by the sword, he did not fall in battle. "But thou shalt die in peace." He did die in peace, he neither expired on the rack, or on the scaffold; was neither strangled, nor poisoned; no unusual fate of captive kings! he died peaceably in his bed, though that bed was in a prison. "And with the burnings of thy fathers shall they burn odors for thee." I cannot prove from the history that this part of the prophecy was accomplished, nor can you prove that it was not. The probability is, that it was accomplished; and I have two reasons on which I ground this probability. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to say nothing of other Jews, were men of great authority in the court of the king of Babylon, before and after the commencement of the imprisonment of Zedekiah; and Daniel continued in power till the subversion of the kingdom of Babylon by Cyrus. Now it seems to me to be very probable, that Daniel, and the other great men of the Jews, would both have inclination to request, and influence enough with the king of Babylon to obtain permission to bury their deceased prince Zedekiah, after the manner of his fathers. But if there had been no Jews at Babylon of consequence enough to make such a request, still it is probable, that the king of Babylon would have ordered the Jews to bury and lament their departed prince, after the manner of their country. Monarchs, like other men, are conscious of the instability of human condition; and when the pomp of war has ceased, when the insolence of conquest is abated, and the fury of resentment subsided, they seldom fail to revere royalty even in its ruins, and grant without reluctance proper obsequies to the remains of captive kings.

You profess to have been particular in treating of the books ascribed to Isaiah and Jeremiah. Particular! in what? You have particularized two or three passages, which you have endeavored to represent as objectionable, and which I hope have been shown, to the reader's satisfaction, to be not justly liable to your censure; and you have passed over all the other parts of these books without notice. Had you been particular in your examination, you would have found cause to admire the probity and the intrepidity of the characters of the authors of them; you would have met with many instances of sublime composition; and, what is of more consequence, with many instances of prophetic veracity. Particularities of these kinds you have wholly overlooked. I cannot account for this; I have no right, no inclination, to call you a dishonest man; am I justified in considering you as a man not altogether destitute

of ingenuity, but so entirely under the dominion of prejudice, in every thing respecting the Bible, that, like a corrupted judge, previously determined to give sentence on one side, you are negligent in the examination of truth?

You proceed to the rest of the prophets, and you take them collectively, carefully however selecting for your observations such particularities as are best calculated to render, if possible, the prophets odious or ridiculous in the eyes of your readers. You confound prophets with poets and musicians: I would distinguish them thus; many prophets were poets and musicians, but all poets and musicians were not prophets. Prophecies were often delivered in poetic language and measure; but flights and metaphors of the Jewish poets have not, as you affirm, been foolishly erected into what are now called prophecies; they are now called, and have always been called, prophecies; because they were real predictions, some of which have received, some are now receiving, and all will receive, their full accomplishment.

That there were false prophets, witches, necromancers, conjurors, fortune-tellers, among the Jews, no person will attempt to deny; no nation, barbarous or civilized, has been without them; but when you would degrade the prophets of the Old Testament to a level with these conjuring, dreaming, strolling gentry; when you would represent them as spending their lives in fortune-telling, casting nativities, predicting riches, fortunate or unfortunate marriages, conjuring for lost goods, &c., I must be allowed to say, that you wholly mistake their office, and misrepresent their character: their office was to convey to the children of Israel the commands, the promises, the threatenings of Almighty God; and their character was that of men sustaining, with fortitude, persecution in the discharge of their duty. There were false prophets in abundance amongst the Jews; and if you oppose these to the true prophets, and call them both party prophets, you have the liberty of doing so, but you will not thereby confound the distinction between truth and falsehood. False prophets are spoken of with detestation in many parts of Scripture, particularly by Jeremiah, who accuses them of prophesying lies in the name of the Lord, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed: Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith, that prophesy false dreams, and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness." Jeremiah cautions his countrymen against giving credit to their prophets, to their diviners, to their dreamers, to their enchanters, to their sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying; "Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon." You cannot think more contemptibly of these gentry than they were thought of by the true prophets at the time they lived; but, as Jeremiah says on this subject, "what is the chaff to the wheat?" what are the false prophets to the true ones? Every thing good is liable to abuse; but who argues against the use of a thing from the abuse of it? against physicians, because there are pretenders to physic? Was Isaiah a fortune-teller, predicting riches, when he said to king Hezekiah, "Behold, the days come,

that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Fortune-tellers generally predict good luck to their simple customers, that they may make something by their trade; but Isaiah predicts to a monarch desolation of his country, and ruin of his family. This prophecy was spoken in the year before Christ, 713; and, above a hundred years afterwards, it was accomplished; when Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house (2 Kings xxiv. 13), and when he commanded the master of his eunuchs (Dan. i. 3), that he should take certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes, and educate them for three years, till they were able to stand before the king.

Jehoram king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and the king of Edom, going with their armies to make war on the king of Moab, came into a place where there was no water either for their men or cattle. In this distress they waited upon Elisha (a high honor for one of your conjurers), by the advice of Jehoshaphat, who knew that the word of the Lord was with him. The prophet, on seeing Jehoram, an idolatrous prince, who had revolted from the worship of the true God, come to consult him, said to him, "Get thee to the prophets of thy father and the prophets of thy mother." This you think shows Elisha to have been a party prophet, full of venom and vulgarity; it shows him to have been a man of great courage, who respected the dignity of his own character, the sacredness of his office as a prophet of God, whose duty it was to reprove the wickedness of kings, as of other men. He ordered them to make the valley where they were full of ditches. This, you say, "every countryman could have told, that the way to get water was to dig for it." But this is not a true representation of the case: the ditches were not dug that water might be gotten by digging for it, but that they might hold the water when it should miraculously come "without wind or rain," from another country; and it did come "from the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water." As to Elisha's cursing the little children who had mocked him, and their destruction in consequence of his imprecation, the whole story must be taken together. The provocation he received is, by some, considered as an insult offered to him, not as a man but as a prophet, and that the persons who offered it were not what we understand by little children, but grown-up youths; the term child being applied, in the Hebrew language, to grown-up persons. Be this as it may, the cursing was the act of the prophet; had it been a sin, it would not have been followed by a miraculous destruction of the offenders; for this was the act of God, who best knows who deserve punishment. What effect such a signal judgment had on the idolatrous inhabitants of the land is nowhere said; but it is probable it was not without a good effect.

Ezekiel and Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity; you allow their writings to be genuine. In this you differ from some of the greatest adversaries of Christianity; and in my opinion cut up, by this concession, the very root of your whole performance. It is next to an impossibility for any man, who admits the book of Daniel to be a genuine book, and who examines that book with intelligence and impartiality, to refuse his assent to the truth of Christianity. As to your saying, that the interpretations which commentators and priests have made of these books, only show the fraud, or the extreme folly, to which credulity and priestcraft can go, I consider it as nothing but a proof of the extreme folly or fraud to which prejudice and infidelity can carry a minute philosopher. You profess a fondness for science; I will refer you to a scientific man, who was neither a commentator nor a priest, to Ferguson. In a tract entitled, *The Year of our Saviour's Crucifixion ascertained*; and the darkness, at the time of his crucifixion, proved to be supernatural; this real philosopher interprets the remarkable prophecy in the ninth chapter of Daniel, and concludes his dissertation in the following words: "Thus we have an astronomical demonstration of the truth of this ancient prophecy, seeing that the prophetic year of the Messiah's being cut off was the very same with the astronomical." I have somewhere read an account of a solemn disputation which was held at Venice, in the last century, between a Jew and a Christian; the Christian strongly argued, from Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks, that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had long expected, from the predictions of their prophets: the learned Rabbi, who presided at this disputation, was so forcibly struck by the argument, that he put an end to the business, by saying, "Let us shut up our Bibles; for if we proceed in the examination of this prophecy, it will make us all become Christians." Was it a similar apprehension which deterred you from so much as opening the Book of Daniel? You have not produced from it one exceptionable passage. I hope you will read that book with attention, with intelligence, and with an unbiassed mind follow the advice of our Saviour when he quoted this very prophecy; "Let him that readeth understand;" and I shall not despair of your conversion from Deism to Christianity.

In order to discredit the authority of the books which you allow to be genuine, you form a strange and prodigious hypothesis concerning Ezekiel and Daniel, for which there is no manner of foundation either in history or probability. You suppose these two men to have had no dreams, no visions, no revelation from God Almighty, but to have pretended to these things; and, under that disguise, to have carried on an enigmatical correspondence relative to the recovery of their country from the Babylonian yoke. That any man in his senses should frame or adopt such an hypothesis, should have so little regard to his own reputation as an impartial inquirer after truth, so little respect for the understanding of his readers, as to obtrude it on the world, would have appeared an incredible circumstance, had not you made it a fact.

You quote a passage from Ezekiel, in chapter *xxix.* ver. 11, speaking of Egypt, it is said: "No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years." This, you say, "never came to pass, and consequently it is false, as all the books I have already reviewed are." Now that this did come to pass we have, as Bishop Newton observes, "the testimonies of Megasthenes and Berosus, two heathen historians, who lived about three hundred years before Christ; one of whom affirms, expressly, that Nebuchadnezzar conquered the greater part of Africa; and the other affirms it, in effect, in saying, that when Nebuchadnezzar heard of the death of his father, having settled his affairs in Egypt, and committed the captives whom he took in Egypt to the care of some of his friends to bring them after him, he hasted directly to Babylon." And if we had been possessed of no testimony in support of the prophecy, it would have been a hasty conclusion, that the prophecy never came to pass; the history of Egypt, at so remote a period, being nowhere accurately and circumstantially related. I admit that no period can be pointed out, from the age of Ezekiel to the present, in which there was no foot of man or beast to be seen for forty years in all Egypt; but some think that only a part of Egypt is here spoken of; and surely you do not expect a literal accomplishment of a hyperbolical expression, denoting great desolation; importing that the trade of Egypt, which was carried on then, as at present, by caravans, by the foot of man and beast, should be annihilated. Had you taken the trouble to have looked a little farther into the book from which you have made your quotation, you would have there seen a prophecy delivered above two thousand years ago, and which has been fulfilling from that time to this: "Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations—there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt." This you may call a dream, a vision, a lie: I esteem it a wonderful prophecy; for "as is the prophecy, so has been the event. Egypt was conquered by the Babylonians; and after the Babylonians by the Persians, and after the Persians it became subject to the Macedonians, and after the Macedonians to the Romans, and after the Romans to the Saracens, and then to the Mamalucs, and is now a province of the Turkish empire."

Suffer me to produce to you from this author, not an enigmatical letter to Daniel respecting the recovery of Jerusalem from the hands of the king of Babylon, but an enigmatical prophecy concerning Zedekiah the king of Jerusalem, before it was taken by the Chaldeans. "I will bring him (Zedekiah) to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there." How! not see Babylon, when he should die there! How, moreover, is this consistent, you may ask, with what Jeremiah had foretold, that Zedekiah should see the eyes of the king of Babylon? This darkness of expression, and apparent contradiction between the two prophets, induced Zedekiah, (as Josephus informs us) to give no credit to either of them; yet he unhappily experienced, the fact is



worthy your observation, the truth of them both. He saw the eyes of the king of Babylon, not at Babylon, but at Riblah; his eyes were there put out; and he was carried to Babylon, yet he saw it not; and thus were the predictions of both the prophets verified, and the enigma of Ezekiel explained.

As to your wonderful discovery, that the prophecy of Jonah is a book of some Gentile, "and that it has been written as a fable, to expose the nonsense, and to satirize the vicious and malignant character of a Bible prophet, or a predicting priest," I shall put it, covered with hellebore, for the service of its author, on the same shelf with your hypothesis concerning the conspiracy of Daniel and Ezekiel, and shall not say another word about it.

You conclude your objections to the Old Testament in a triumphant style; an angry opponent would say, in a style of extreme arrogance and sottish self-sufficiency. "I have gone," you say, "through the Bible (mistaking here, as in other places, the Old Testament for the Bible) as a man would go through a wood, with an ax on his shoulders, and fell trees; here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never grow." And is it possible, that you should think so highly of your performance as to believe, that you have thereby demolished the authority of a book, which Newton himself esteemed the most authentic of all histories; which, by its celestial light, illumines the darkest ages of antiquity; which is the touchstone whereby we are enabled to distinguish between true and fabulous theology, between the God of Israel, holy, just, and good, and the impure rabble of heathen Baalim: which has been thought, by competent judges, to have afforded matter for the laws of Solon, and a foundation for the philosophy of Plato; which has been illustrated by the labor of learning, in all ages and countries; and been admired and venerated for its piety, its sublimity, its veracity, by all who were able to read and understand it? No, Sir; you have gone indeed through the wood, with the best intention in the world to cut it down; but you have merely busied yourself in exposing to vulgar contempt a few unsightly shrubs, which good men had wisely concealed from public view; you have entangled yourself in thickets of thorns and briers; you have lost your way on the mountains of Lebanon; the goodly cedar trees whereof, lamenting the madness, and pitying the blindness of your rage against them, have scorned the blunt edge and the base temper of your ax, and laughed unhurt at the feebleness of your stroke.

In plain language, you have gone through the Old Testament hunting after difficulties, and you have found some real ones; these you have endeavored to magnify into insurmountable objections to the authority of the whole book. When it is considered, that the Old Testament is composed of several books, written by different authors, and at different periods, from Moses to Malachi, comprising an abstracted history of a particular nation for above a thousand years, I think the real difficulties which occur in it are much fewer, and of much less importance, than could reasonably have been

expected. Apparent difficulties you have represented as real ones, without hinting at the manner in which they have been explained. You have ridiculed things held most sacred, and calumniated characters esteemed most venerable; you have excited the scoffs of the profane; increased the scepticism of the doubtful; shaken the faith of the unlearned; suggested cavils to the "disputers of this world;" and perplexed the minds of honest men, who wish to worship the God of their fathers in sincerity and truth. This, and more, you have done in going through the Old Testament; but you have not so much as glanced at the great design of the whole, at the harmony and mutual dependence of the several parts. You have said nothing of the wisdom of God in selecting a particular people from the rest of mankind, not for their own sakes, but that they might witness to the whole world, in successive ages, his existence and attributes; that they might be an instrument of subverting idolatry; of declaring the name of the God of Israel throughout the whole earth. It was through this nation that the Egyptians saw the wonders of God; that the Canaanites (whom wickedness had made a reproach to human nature) felt his judgments; that the Babylonians issued their decrees: "That none should dare to speak amiss of the God of Israel; that all should fear and tremble before him;" and it is through them that you and I, and all the world, are not at this day worshippers of idols. You have said nothing of the goodness of God in promising, that through the seed of Abraham all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; that the desire of all nations, the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, should come. You have passed by all the prophecies respecting the coming of the Messiah; though they absolutely fixed the time of his coming, and of his being cut off; described his office, character, condition, sufferings, and death, in so circumstantial a manner, that we cannot but be astonished at the accuracy of their completion in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. You have neglected noticing the testimony of the whole Jewish nation to the truth both of the natural and miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament. That we may better judge of the weight of this testimony, let us suppose, that God should now manifest himself to us, as we contend he did to the Israelites in Egypt, in the desert, and in the land of Canaan; and that he should continue these manifestations of himself to our posterity for a thousand years or more, punishing or rewarding them according as they disobeyed or obeyed his commands; what would you expect should be the issue? You would expect that our posterity would, in the remotest period of time, adhere to their God, and maintain, against all opponents, the truth of the books in which the dispensations of God to us and to our successors had been recorded. They would not yield to the objections of men, who, not having experienced the same Divine government, should, for want of such experience, refuse assent to their testimony. No; they would be to the then surrounding nations, what the Jews are to us, witnesses of the existence, and of the moral government, of God.

## LETTER VII.

"THE New Testament, they tell us, is founded upon the prophecies of the Old; if so, it must follow the fate of its foundation." Thus you open your attack upon the New Testament; and I agree with you, that the New Testament must follow the fate of the Old; and that fate is to remain unimpaired by such efforts as you have made against it. The New Testament, however, is not founded solely on the prophecies of the Old. If a heathen from Athens or Rome, who had never heard of the prophecies of the Old Testament, had been an eye-witness of the miracles of Jesus; he would have made the same conclusion that the Jew Nicodemus did: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Our Saviour tells the Jews, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me;" and he bids them search the Scriptures, for they testified of him. But, notwithstanding this appeal to the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus said to the Jews, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works"—"believe me for the very works' sake"—"If had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." These are sufficient proofs, that the truth of Christ's mission was not even to the Jews, much less to the Gentiles, founded solely on the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament. So that if you could prove some of these prophecies to have been misapplied, and not completed in the person of Jesus, the truth of the Christian religion would not thereby be overturned. That Jesus of Nazareth was the person, in whom all the prophecies, direct and typical, in the Old Testament, respecting the Messiah, were fulfilled, is a proposition founded on those prophecies, and to be proved by comparing them with the history of his life. That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God, is one proposition; that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another; and though he certainly was both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct.

The mere existence "of such a woman as Mary, and of such a man as Joseph, and Jesus," is, you say, a matter of indifference, about which there is no ground either to believe or to disbelieve. Belief is different from knowledge, with which you here seem to confound it. We know that the whole is greater than its parts; and we know that all the angles in the same segment of a circle are equal to each other; we have intuition and demonstration as grounds of this knowledge; but is there no ground for belief of past or future existence? Is there no ground for believing that the sun will exist to-morrow, and that your father existed before you? You condescend, however, to think it probable, that there were such persons as Mary, Joseph, and Jesus; and, without troubling yourself about their existence or non-existence, assuming, as it were, for the

sake of argument, but without positively granting their existence, you proceed to inform us, "that it is the fable of Jesus Christ, as told in the New Testament, and the wild and visionary doctrine raised thereon," against which you contend. You will not repute it a fable, that there was such a man as Jesus Christ; that he lived in Judea near eighteen hundred years ago; that he went about doing good, and preaching; not only in the villages of Galilee, but in the city of Jerusalem; that he had several followers who constantly attended him; that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate; that his disciples were numerous a few years after his death, not only in Judea, but in Rome, the capital of the world, and in every province of the Roman empire; that a particular day has been observed in a religious manner by all his followers, in commemoration of a real or supposed resurrection; and that the constant celebration of baptism, and of the Lord's supper, may be traced back from the present time to him, as the author of those institutions. These things constitute, I suppose, no part of your fable; and if these things be facts, they will, when maturely considered, draw after them so many other things related in the New Testament concerning Jesus, that there will be left for your fable but very scanty materials, which will require great fertility of invention before you will dress them up into any form, which will not disgust even a superficial observer.

The miraculous conception you esteem a fable, and in your mind it is an obscene fable. Impure, indeed, must that man's imagination be, who can discover any obscenity in the angel's declaration to Mary. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." I wonder you do not find obscenity in Genesis, where it is said, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and brought order out of confusion, a world out of chaos, by his fostering influence. As to the Christian faith being built upon the heathen mythology, there is no ground whatever for the assertion; there would have been some for saying, that much of the heathen mythology was built upon the events recorded in the Old Testament.

You come now to a demonstration, or, which amounts to the same thing, to a proposition which cannot, you say, be controverted. First, "That the *agreement* of all the parts of a story does not prove that story to be true, because the parts may agree, and the whole may be false. Secondly, That the *disagreement* of the parts of a story proves, that the *whole cannot be true*. The agreement does not prove truth, but the disagreement proves falsehood positively." Great use, I perceive, is to be made of this proposition, You will pardon my unskilfulness in dialectics, if I presume to controvert the truth of this abstract proposition, as applied to any purpose in life. The agreement of the parts of a story implies that the story has been told by, at least, two persons (the life of Doctor Johnson, for instance, by Sir John Hawkins and Mr. Boswell.) Now I think it scarcely possible for even two persons, and the difficulty is increased

if there are more than two, to write the history of the life of **any** one of their acquaintance, without there being a considerable difference between them, with respect to the number and order of the incidents of his life. Some things will be omitted by one, and mentioned by the other; some things will be briefly touched by one, and the same things will be circumstantially detailed by the other; the same things, which are mentioned in the same way by them both, may not be mentioned as having happened exactly at the same point of time, with other possible and probable differences. But these real or apparent difficulties, in minute circumstances, will not invalidate their testimony as to the material transactions of his life, much less will they render the whole of it a fable. If several independent witnesses, of fair character, should agree in all the parts of a story (in testifying, for instance, that a murder or a robbery was committed at a particular time, in a particular place, and by a certain individual), every court of justice in the world would admit the fact, notwithstanding the abstract possibility of the whole being false. Again, if several honest men should agree in saying, that they saw the King of France beheaded, though they should disagree as to the figure of the guillotine, or the size of his executioner, as to the King's hands being bound or loose, as to his being composed or agitated in ascending the scaffold, yet every court of justice in the world would think, that such difference, respecting the circumstances of the fact, did not invalidate the evidence respecting the fact itself. When you speak of the whole of a story, you cannot mean every particular circumstance connected with the story, but not essential to it; you must mean the pith and marrow of the story; for it would be impossible to establish the truth of any fact (of admirals Byng or Keppel, for example, having neglected or not neglected their duty), if a disagreement in the evidence of witnesses, in minute points, should be considered as annihilating the weight of their evidence in points of importance. In a word, the relation of a fact differs essentially from the demonstration of a theorem. If one step is left out, one link in the chain of ideas constituting a demonstration is omitted, the conclusion will be destroyed; but a fact may be established, notwithstanding a disagreement of the witnesses in certain trifling particulars of their evidence respecting it.

You apply your incontrovertible proposition to the genealogies of Christ given by Matthew and Luke; there is a disagreement between them; therefore, you say, "If Matthew speak truth, Luke speaks falsehood; and if Luke speak truth, Matthew speaks falsehood; and thence, there is no authority for believing either; and if they cannot be believed even in the very first thing they say and set out to prove, they are not entitled to be believed in any thing they say afterwards." I cannot admit either your premises or your conclusion—not your conclusion; because two authors, who differ in tracing back the pedigree of an individual for above a thousand years, cannot, on that account, be esteemed incompetent to bear testimony to the transactions of his life, unless an intention to falsify

could be proved against them. If two Welsh historians should at this time write the life of any remarkable man of their country, who had been dead twenty or thirty years, and should, through different branches of their genealogical tree, carry up the pedigree to Cadwallon, would they, on account of that difference, be discredited in every thing they said? Might it not be believed, that they gave the pedigree as they had found it recorded in different instruments, but without the least intention to write a falsehood? I cannot admit your premises; because Matthew speaks truth, and Luke speaks truth, though they do not speak the same truth; Matthew giving the genealogy of Joseph the reputed father of Jesus, and Luke giving the genealogy of Mary the real mother of Jesus. If you will not admit this, other explanations of the difficulty might be given; but I hold it sufficient to say, that the authors had no design to deceive the reader, that they took their accounts from the public registers, which were carefully kept; and that had they been fabricators of these genealogies, they would have been exposed at the time to instant detection; and the certainty of that detection would have prevented them from making the attempt to impose a false genealogy on the Jewish nation.

But, that you may effectually overthrow the credit of these genealogies, you make the following calculation:—"From the birth of David to the birth of Christ is upwards of one thousand and eighty years; and as there were but twenty-seven full generations, to find the average age of each person mentioned in St. Matthew's list at the time his first son was born, it is only necessary to divide one thousand and eighty by twenty-seven, which gives forty years for each person. As the life-time of man was then but of the same extent it is now, it is an absurdity to suppose, that twenty-seven generations should all be old bachelors, before they married. So far from this genealogy being a solemn truth, it is not even a reasonable lie." This argument assumes the appearance of arithmetical accuracy, and the conclusion is in a style which even its truth would not excuse; yet the argument is good for nothing, and the conclusion is not true. You have read the Bible with some attention; and you are extremely liberal in imputing to it lies and absurdities; read it over again, especially the books of the Chronicles, and you will there find, that, in the genealogical list of St. Matthew, three generations are omitted between Joram and Ozias; Joram was the father of Azariah, Azariah of Joash, Joash of Amaziah, and Amaziah of Ozias. I inquire not, in this place, whence this omission proceeded; whether it is to be attributed to an error in the genealogical tables from whence Matthew took his account, or to a corruption of the text of the evangelist; still it is an omission. Now if you will add these three generations to the twenty-seven you mention, and divide one thousand and eighty by thirty, you will find the average age when these Jews had each of them their first son born was thirty-six. They married sooner than they ought to have done, according to Aristotle, who fixes thirty-seven as the most proper age, when a man should marry. Nor was it necessary

that they should have been old bachelors, though each of them had not a son to succeed him till he was thirty-six; they might have been married at twenty, without having a son till they were forty. You assume in your argument, that the first-born son succeeded the father in the list; this is not true. Solomon succeeded David; yet David had at least six sons, who were grown to manhood before Solomon was born; and Rehoboam had, at least, three sons before he had Abia (Abijah) who succeeded him. It is needless to cite more instances to this purpose; but from these, and other circumstances which might be insisted upon, I can see no ground for believing, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ, mentioned by St. Matthew, is not a solemn truth.

You insist much upon some things being mentioned by one evangelist, which are not mentioned by all, or by any of the others; and you take this to be a reason why we should consider the Gospels, not as the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but as the productions of some *unconnected* individuals, each of whom made his own legend. I do not admit the truth of this supposition; but I may be allowed to use it as an argument against yourself; it removes every possible suspicion of fraud and imposture, and confirms the Gospel history in the strongest manner. Four *unconnected* individuals have each written memoirs of the life of Jesus; from whatever source they derived their materials, it is evident that they agree in a great many particulars of the last importance; such as the purity of his manners; the sanctity of his doctrines; the multitude and publicity of his miracles; the persecuting spirit of his enemies; the manner of his death; and the certainty of his resurrection; and whilst they agree in these great points, their disagreement in points of little consequence is rather a confirmation of the truth, than an indication of the falsehood, of their several accounts. Had they agreed in nothing, their testimony ought to have been rejected as a legendary tale; had they agreed in every thing, it might have been suspected, that, instead of unconnected individuals, they were a set of impostors. The manner in which the evangelists have recorded the particulars of the life of Jesus is wholly conformable to what we experience in other biographers, and claims our highest assent to its truth; notwithstanding the force of your incontrovertible proposition.

As an instance of contradiction between the evangelists, you tell us, that Matthew says, the angel announcing the immaculate conception appeared unto Joseph; but Luke says, he appeared unto Mary. The angel, Sir, appeared to them both; to Mary, when he informed her that she should, by the power of God, conceive a son; to Joseph, some months afterwards, when Mary's pregnancy was visible; in the interim she had paid a visit of three months to her cousin Elizabeth. It might have been expected, that, from the accuracy with which you have read your Bible, you could not have confounded these obviously distinct appearances; but men, even of candor, are liable to mistakes. Who, you ask, would now believe a girl, who should say she was gotten with child by a ghost? Who,

but yourself, would ever have asked a question so abominably indecent and profane? I cannot argue with you on this subject. You will never persuade the world, that the Holy Spirit of God has any resemblance to the stage ghosts in Hamlet or Macbeth, from which you seem to have derived your idea of it.

The story of the massacre of the young children by the order of Herod is mentioned only by Matthew; and, therefore, you think it is a lie. We must give up all history, if we refuse to admit facts recorded by only one historian. Matthew addressed his Gospel to the Jews, and put them in mind of a circumstance, of which they must have had a melancholy remembrance; but Gentile converts were less interested in that event. The evangelists were not writing the life of Herod, but of Jesus; it is no wonder that they omitted, above half a century after the death of Herod, an instance of his cruelty, which was not essentially connected with their subject. The massacre, however, was probably known even at Rome; and it was certainly correspondent to the character of Herod. John, you say, at the time of the massacre, "was under two years of age, and yet he escaped; so that the story circumstantially belies itself." John was six months older than Jesus; and you cannot prove that he was not beyond the age to which the order of Herod extended; it probably reached no farther than to those who had completed their first year, without including those who had entered upon their second; but, without insisting upon this, still I contend that you cannot prove John to have been under two years of age at the time of the massacre; and I could give many probable reasons to the contrary. Nor is it certain that John was, at that time, in that part of the country to which the edict of Herod extended. But there would be no end of answering, at length, all your little objections.

No two of the evangelists, you observe, agree in reciting, *exactly in the same words*, the written inscription which was put over Christ when he was crucified. I admit that there is an unessential verbal difference; and are you certain that there was not a verbal difference in the inscriptions themselves? One was written in Hebrew, another in Greek, another in Latin; and, though they had all the same meaning, yet it is probable, that if two men had translated the Hebrew and the Latin into Greek, there would have been a verbal difference between their translations. You have rendered yourself famous by writing a book called, *The Rights of Man*: had you been guillotined by Robespierre, with this title, written in French, English, and German, and affixed to the guillotine, "Thomas Paine, of America, author of *The Rights of Man*;" and had four persons, some of whom had seen the execution, and the rest had heard of it from eye-witnesses, written short accounts of your life twenty years or more after your death, and one had said the inscription was, "This is Thomas Paine, the author of *The Rights of Man*;" another, "The author of *The Rights of Man*;" a third, "This is the author of *The Rights of Man*;" and a fourth, "Thomas Paine, of America, the author of *The Rights of Man*;" would any



man of common sense have doubted, on account of this disagreement, the veracity of the authors in writing your life? "The only one," you tell us, "of the men called apostles, who appears to have been near the spot where Jesus was crucified, was Peter." This your assertion is not true; we do not know that Peter was present at the crucifixion; but we do know that John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was present; for Jesus spoke to him from the cross. You go on, "But why should we believe Peter, convicted by their own account of perjury, in swearing that he knew not Jesus?" I will tell you why; because Peter sincerely repented of the wickedness into which he had been betrayed, through fear for his life, and suffered martyrdom in attestation of the truth of the Christian religion.

But the evangelists disagree, you say, not only as to the superscription on the cross, but as to the time of the crucifixion, "Mark saying it was at the third hour (nine in the morning), and John at the sixth hour (twelve, as you suppose, at noon.\*)" Various solutions have been given of this difficulty, none of which satisfied Doctor Middleton, much less can it be expected that any of them should satisfy you; but there is a solution not noticed by him, in which many judicious men have acquiesced, that John, writing his Gospel in Asia, used the Roman method of computing time; which was the same as our own; so that by the sixth hour, when Jesus was *condemned*, we are to understand six o'clock in the morning; the intermediate time from six to nine, when he was crucified, being employed in preparing for the crucifixion. But if this difficulty should be still esteemed insuperable, it does not follow that it will always remain so; and if it should, the main point, the crucifixion of Jesus, will not be affected thereby.

I cannot, in this place, omit remarking some circumstances attending the crucifixion, which are so natural, that we might have wondered if they had not occurred. Of all the disciples of Jesus, John was beloved by him with a peculiar degree of affection; and, as kindness produces kindness, there can be little doubt that the regard was reciprocal. Now, whom should we expect to be the attendants of Jesus in his last suffering? Whom but John, the friend of his heart? Whom but his mother, whose soul was now pierced through by the sword of sorrow, which Simeon had foretold? Whom but those, who had been attached to him through life; who, having been healed by him of their infirmities, were impelled by gratitude to minister to him of their substance, to be attentive to all his wants? These were the persons whom we should have expected to attend his execution; and these were there. To whom would an expiring son, of the best affections, recommend a poor, and, probably, a widowed mother, but to his warmest friend? And this did Jesus. Unmindful of the extremity of his own torture, and anxious to alleviate the burthen of her sorrows, and to protect her old age from future want and misery, he said to his beloved disciple, "Behold thy mother! and from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." I own to you, that such instances as these, of the

conformity of events to our probable expectation, are to me genuine marks of the simplicity and truth of the Gospels; and far outweigh a thousand little objections, arising from our ignorance of manners, times, and circumstances, or from our incapacity to comprehend the means used by the Supreme Being in the moral government of his creatures.

St. Matthew mentions several miracles which attended our Saviour's crucifixion; the darkness which overspread the land; the rending of the veil of the temple; an earthquake which rent the rocks; and the resurrection of many saints, and their going into the holy city. "Such," you say, "is the account which this dashing writer of the book of Matthew gives, but in which he is not supported by the writers of the other books." This is not accurately expressed; Matthew is supported by Mark and Luke, with respect to two of the miracles; the darkness, and the rending of the veil; and their omission of the others does not prove, that they were either ignorant of them, or disbelieved them. I think it idle to pretend to say positively what influenced them to mention only two miracles; they probably thought them sufficient to convince any person, as they convinced the centurion, that Jesus "was a righteous man"—"the Son of God." And these two miracles were better calculated to produce general conviction, amongst the persons for whose benefit Mark and Luke wrote their Gospels, than either the earthquake or the resurrection of the saints. The earthquake was, probably, confined to a particular spot, and might, by an objector, have been called a natural phenomenon; and those to whom the saints appeared might, at the time of writing the Gospels of Mark and Luke, have been dead; but the darkness must have been generally known and remembered; and the veil of the temple might still be preserved at the time these authors wrote. As to John not mentioning any of these miracles, it is well known, that his Gospel was written as a kind of supplement to the other Gospels; he has, therefore, omitted many things which the other three evangelists had related, and he has added several things which they had not mentioned; in particular, he has added a circumstance of great importance; he tells us, that he saw one of the soldiers pierce the side of Jesus with a spear, and that blood and water flowed through the wound; and lest any one should doubt of the fact, from its not being mentioned by the other evangelists, he asserts it with peculiar earnestness:—"And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John saw blood and water flowing from the wound; the blood is easily accounted for; but whence came the water? The anatomists tell us, that it came from the *pericardium*; so consistent is evangelical testimony with the most curious researches into natural science! You amuse yourself with the account of what the Scripture calls *many* saints, and you call an *army* of saints, and are angry with Matthew for not having told you a great many things about them. It is very possible, that Matthew might have known the fact of their resurrection, without knowing

every thing about them; but if he had gratified your curiosity in every particular, I am of opinion that you would not have believed a word of what he had told you. I have no curiosity on the subject; it is enough for me to know, that "Christ was the first fruits of them that slept," and "that all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth," as those holy men did, who heard the voice of the Son of God at his resurrection, and passed from death to life. If I first indulge myself in being wise above what is written, I might be able to answer many of your inquiries relative to these saints; but I dare not touch the ark of the Lord, I dare not support the authority of Scripture by the boldness of conjecture. Whatever difficulty there may be in accounting for the silence of the other evangelists, and of St. Paul also, on this subject, yet there is a greater difficulty in supposing that Matthew did not give a true narration of what had happened at the crucifixion. If there had been no supernatural darkness, no earthquake, no rending of the veil of the temple, no graves opened, no resurrection of holy men, no appearance of them unto many; if none of these things had been true, or rather if any one of them had been false, what motive could Matthew, writing to the Jews, have had for trumping up such wonderful stories? He wrote as every man does, with an intention to be believed; and yet every Jew he met would have stared him in the face, and told him that he was a liar and an impostor. What author, who, twenty years hence, should address to the French nation a history of Louis XVI., would venture to affirm, that when he was beheaded there was darkness for three hours over all France? that there was an earthquake? that rocks were split? graves opened? and dead men brought to life, who appeared to many persons in Paris? It is quite impossible to suppose, that any one would dare to publish such obvious lies; and I think it equally impossible to suppose, that Matthew would have dared to publish his account of what happened at the death of Jesus, had not that account been generally known to be true.

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### LETTER VIII.

THE "tale of the resurrection," you say, "follows that of the crucifixion." You have accustomed me so much to this kind of language, that when I find you speaking of a tale, I have no doubt of meeting with a truth. From the apparent disagreement in the accounts, which the evangelists have given of some circumstances respecting the resurrection, you remark, "If the writers of these books had gone into any court of justice to prove an *alibi* (for it is the nature of an *alibi* that is here attempted to be proved, namely, the absence of a dead body by supernatural means), and had given their evidence in the same contradictory manner, as it is here given;

they would have been in danger of having their ears cropt for perjury, and would have justly deserved it;" "hard words, or hanging," it seems, if you had been their judge. Now I maintain, that it is the brevity with which the account of the resurrection is given by all the evangelists, which has occasioned the seeming confusion; and that this confusion would have been cleared up at once, if the witnesses of the resurrection had been examined before any judicature. As we cannot have this *viva voce* examination of all the witnesses, let us call up and question the evangelists as witnesses to a supernatural alibi. Did you find the sepulchre of Jesus empty? One of us actually saw it empty, and the rest heard, from eye-witnesses, that it was empty. Did you, or any of the followers of Jesus, take away the dead body from the sepulchre? All answer, No. Did the soldiers, or the Jews, take away the body? No. How are you certain of that? Because we saw the body when it was dead, and we saw it afterwards when it was alive. How do you know that what you saw was the body of Jesus? We had been long and intimately acquainted with Jesus, and knew his person perfectly. Were you not affrighted, and mistook a spirit for a body? No; the body had flesh and bones; we are sure that it was the very body which hung upon the cross, for we saw the wound in the side, and the print of the nails in the hands and feet. And all this you are ready to swear? We are; and we are ready to die also, sooner than we will deny any part of it. This is the testimony which all the evangelists would give, in whatever court of justice they were examined; and this, I apprehend, would sufficiently establish the alibi of the dead body from the sepulchre by supernatural means.

But as the resurrection of Jesus is a point which you attack with all your force, I will examine minutely the principal of your objections; I do not think them deserving of this notice, but they shall have it. The book of Matthew, you say, states, "that when Christ was put in the sepulchre, the Jews applied to Pilate for a watch or a guard to be placed over the sepulchre, to prevent the body being stolen by the disciples." I admit this account, but it is not the whole of the account; you have omitted the reason for the request which the chief priests made to Pilate; "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again." It is material to remark this; for, at the very time that Jesus predicted his resurrection, he predicted also his crucifixion, and all that he should suffer from the malice of those very men who now applied to Pilate for a guard. "He showed to his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." (Matt. xvi. 21.) These men knew full well that the first part of this prediction had been accurately fulfilled through their malignity; and, instead of repenting of what they had done, they were so infatuated as to suppose, that by a guard of soldiers they could prevent the completion of the second. The other books, you observe, "say nothing about this application, nor about the sealing of the stone, nor the guard, nor the watch, and

according to these accounts there were none." This, Sir, I deny. The other books do not say that there were none of these things; how often must I repeat, that omissions are not contradictions, nor silence concerning a fact a denial of it?

You go on: "The book of Matthew continues its account, that at the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn, towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. Mark says it was sunrising, and John says it was dark. Luke says it was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that came to the sepulchre. And John says that Mary Magdalene came alone. So well do they agree about their first evidence! they all appear, however, to have known most about Mary Magdalene; she was a woman of a large acquaintance, and it was not an ill conjecture that she might be upon the stroll." This is a long paragraph; I will answer it distinctly. First, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the time when the women went to the sepulchre; all the evangelists agree as to the day on which they went; and, as to the time of the day, it was early in the morning; what court of justice in the world would set aside this evidence, as insufficient to substantiate the fact of the women's having gone to the sepulchre, because the witnesses differed as to the degree of twilight which lighted them on their way? Secondly, there is no disagreement of evidence with respect to the persons who went to the sepulchre. John states that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre; but he does not state, as you make him state, that Mary Magdalene went alone; she might, for any thing you have proved, or can prove to the contrary, have been accompanied by all the women mentioned by Luke. Is it an unusual thing to distinguish by name a principal person going on a visit, or an embassy, without mentioning his subordinate attendants? Thirdly, in opposition to your insinuation, that Mary Magdalene was a common woman, I wish it to be considered, whether there is any scriptural authority for that imputation; and whether there be or not, I must contend, that a repentant and reformed woman ought not to be esteemed an improper witness of a fact. The conjecture, which you adopt concerning her, is nothing less than an illiberal, indecent, unfounded calumny, not excusable in the mouth of a libertine, and intolerable in yours.

The book of Matthew, you observe, goes on to say: "And behold, there was an earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it; but the other books say nothing about any earthquake." What then? does their silence prove that there was none? "nor about the angel rolling back the stone and sitting upon it;" what then? does their silence prove that the stone was not rolled back by an angel, and that he did not sit upon it? "and, according to their accounts, there was no angel sitting there." This conclusion I must deny; their accounts do not say there was no angel sitting there at the time that Matthew says he sat upon the stone. They do not deny the fact, they simply omit the mention of it; and they

all take notice, that the women, when they arrived at the sepulchre, found the stone rolled away. Hence it is evident, that the stone was rolled away *before* the women arrived at the sepulchre; and the other evangelists, giving an account of what happened to the women *when* they reached the sepulchre, have merely omitted giving an account of a transaction previous to their arrival. Where is the contradiction? What space of time intervened between the rolling away the stone, and the arrival of the women at the sepulchre, is nowhere mentioned; but it certainly was long enough for the angel to have changed his position; from sitting on the outside he might have entered into the sepulchre; and another angel might have made his appearance, or, from the first, there might have been two, one on the outside rolling away the stone, and the other within. Luke, you tell us, "says there were two, and they were both standing; and John says there were two, and both sitting." It is impossible, I grant, even for an angel to be sitting and standing at the same instant of time; but Luke and John do not speak of the same instant, nor of the same appearance. Luke speaks of the appearance to all the women; and John of the appearance to Mary Magdalene alone, who tarried weeping at the sepulchre after Peter and John had left it. But I forbear making any more minute remarks on still more minute objections, all of which are grounded on this mistake, that the angels were seen at one particular time, in one particular place, and by the same individuals.

As to your inference from Matthew's using the expression "unto this day," "that the book must have been manufactured after a lapse of some generations at least," it cannot be admitted against the positive testimony of all antiquity. That the story about stealing away the body was a bungling story, I readily admit; but the chief priests are answerable for it; it is not worthy either your notice, or mine; except as it is a strong instance to you, to me, and to every body, how far prejudice may mislead the understanding.

You come to that part of the evidence in those books that respects, you say, "the pretended appearance of Christ after his pretended resurrection;" the writer of the book of Matthew relates, that the angel that was sitting on the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre said to the two Marys (chap. xxviii. 7), "Behold, Christ is gone before you into Galilee, there shall you see him." The Gospel, Sir, was preached to poor and illiterate men; and it is the duty of priests to preach it to them in all its purity; to guard them against the errors of mistaken, or the designs of wicked men. You then, who can read your Bible, turn to this passage, and you will find that the angel did not say, "Behold, Christ is gone before into Galilee;" but, "Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee." I know not what Bible you made use of in this quotation, none that I have seen render the original word by—he is gone. It might be properly rendered, he will go; and it is literally rendered, he is going. This phrase does not imply an immediate setting out for Galilee; when a man has fixed upon a long journey to London or Bath, it is common enough to say, he is going to London or Bath, though the time

of his going may be at some distance. Even your dashing Matthew could not be guilty of such a blunder as to make the angel say "he is gone;" for he tells us immediately afterwards, that, as the women were departing from the sepulchre to tell his disciples what the angels had said to them, Jesus himself met them. Now, how Jesus could be "gone" into Galilee, and yet meet the women at Jerusalem, I leave you to explain, for the blunder is not chargeable upon Matthew. I excuse your introducing the expression, "then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee," for the quotation is rightly made; but had you turned to the Greek Testament, you would not have found in this place any word answering to *then*; the passage is better translated, "and the eleven." Christ had said to his disciples (Matt. xxvi. 32), "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee;" and the angel put the women in mind of the very expression and prediction, "he is risen, as he said; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee." Matthew, intent upon the appearance in Galilee, of which there were, probably, at the time he wrote, many living witnesses in Judea, omits the mention of many appearances taken notice of by John, and, by this omission, seems to connect the day of the resurrection of Jesus with that of the departure of the disciples for Galilee. You seem to think this a great difficulty, and incapable of solution; for you say, "it is not possible, unless we admit these disciples the right of wilful lying, that the writers of these books could be any of the eleven persons called disciples; for if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain, by his own appointment, on the same day that he is said to have risen, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven; yet the writer of Luke says expressly, and John implies as much, that the meeting was that same day in a house at Jerusalem; and on the other hand, if, according to Luke and John, the *eleven* were assembled in a house at Jerusalem, Matthew must have been one of that eleven; yet Matthew says, the meeting was in a mountain in Galilee, and consequently the evidence given in those books destroys each other." When I was a young man in the university, I was pretty much accustomed to drawing of consequences; but my *Alma Mater* did not suffer me to draw consequences after your manner! she taught me, that a false position must end in an absurd conclusion; I have shown your position, that the eleven went into Galilee on the day of the resurrection, to be false; and hence your consequence, that the evidence given in these two books destroys each other, is not to be admitted. You ought, moreover, to have considered, that the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the passover was eaten, lasted seven days; and that strict observers of the law did not think themselves at liberty to leave Jerusalem till that feast was ended; and this is a collateral proof, that the disciples did not go to Galilee on the day of the resurrection.

You certainly have read the New Testament, but not, I think, with great attention, or you would have known who the apostles were. In this place you reckon Luke as one of the eleven, and

in other places you speak of him as an eye-witness of the things he relates: you ought to have known, that Luke was no apostle; and he tells you himself, in the preface to his Gospel, that he wrote from the testimony of others. If this mistake proceeds from your ignorance, you are not a fit person to write comments on the Bible; if from design (which I am unwilling to suspect), you are still less fit; in either case it may suggest to your readers the propriety of suspecting the truth and accuracy of your assertions, however daring and intemperate. "Of the numerous priests or parsons of the present day, bishops and all, the sum-total of whose learning," according to you, "is *a b ab*, and *hic, hæc, hoc*, there is not one amongst them," you say, "who can write poetry like Homer, or science like Euclid." If I should admit this (though there are many of them, I doubt not, who understand these authors better than you do), yet I cannot admit that there is one amongst them, bishops and all, so ignorant as to rank Luke the evangelist among the apostles of Christ. I will not press this point; any man may fall into a mistake, and the consciousness of this fallibility should create in all men a little modesty, a little diffidence, a little caution, before they presume to call the most illustrious characters of antiquity, liars, fools, and knaves.

You want to know why Jesus did not show himself to all the people after the resurrection. This is one of Spinoza's objections; and it may sound well enough in the mouth of a Jew, wishing to excuse the infidelity of his countrymen; but it is not judiciously adopted by deists of other nations. God gives us the means of health, but he does not force us to the use of them; he gives us the powers of the mind, but he does not compel us to the cultivation of them; he gave the Jews opportunities of seeing the miracles of Jesus, but he did not oblige them to believe them. They, who persevered in their incredulity after the resurrection of Lazarus, would have persevered also after the resurrection of Jesus. Lazarus had been buried four days, Jesus but three; the body of Lazarus had begun to undergo corruption, the body of Jesus saw no corruption; why should you expect, that they would have believed in Jesus on his own resurrection, when they had not believed in him on the resurrection of Lazarus? When the Pharisees were told of the resurrection of Lazarus, they, together with the chief priests, gathered a council, and said, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: then from that day forth they took counsel together to put him to death." The great men at Jerusalem, you see, admitted that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead; yet the belief of that miracle did not generate conviction that Jesus was the Christ; it only exasperated their malice, and accelerated their purpose of destroying him. Had Jesus shown himself after his resurrection, the chief priests would probably have gathered together another council, have opened it, What do we? and ended it with a determination to put him to death. As to us, the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, which we have in the New Testament, is far more convincing, than if it had been related that he showed himself to every man in Jeru-



salem; for then we should have had a suspicion, that the whole story had been fabricated by the Jews.

You think Paul an improper witness of the resurrection; I think him one of the fittest that could have been chosen; and for this reason, his testimony is the testimony of a former enemy. He had, in his own miraculous conversion, sufficient ground for changing his opinion as to a matter of fact; for believing that to have been a fact, which he had formerly, through extreme prejudice, considered as a fable. For the truth of the resurrection of Jesus he appeals to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses; and before whom does he make this appeal? Before his enemies, who were able and willing to blast his character, if he had advanced an untruth. You know, undoubtedly, that Paul had resided at Corinth near two years; that, during a part of that time, he had testified to the Jews, that Jesus was the Christ; that, finding the bulk of that nation obstinate in their unbelief, he had turned to the Gentiles, and had converted many to the faith in Christ; that he left Corinth, and went to preach the Gospel in other parts; that, about three years after he had quitted Corinth, he wrote a letter to the converts which he had made in that place, and who, after his departure, had been split into different factions, and had adopted different teachers in opposition to Paul. From this account we may be certain, that Paul's letter, and every circumstance in it, would be minutely examined. The city of Corinth was full of Jews; these men were, in general, Paul's bitter enemies; yet, in the face of them all, he asserts, "that Jesus Christ was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was afterwards seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part were then alive. An appeal to above two hundred and fifty living witnesses is a pretty strong proof of a fact; but it becomes irresistible, when that appeal is submitted to the judgment of enemies. St. Paul, you must allow, was a man of ability; but he would have been an idiot had he put it in the power of his enemies to prove, from his own letter, that he was a lying rascal. They neither proved, nor attempted to prove, any such thing; and, therefore, we may safely conclude, that this testimony of Paul to the resurrection of Jesus was true; and it is a testimony, in my opinion, of the greatest weight.

You come, you say, to the last scene, the ascension; upon which, in your opinion, "the reality of the future mission of the disciples was to rest for proof." I do not agree with you in this. The reality of the future mission of the apostles might have been proved, though Jesus Christ had not visibly ascended into heaven. Miracles are the proper proofs of a divine mission; and when Jesus gave the apostles a commission to preach the Gospel, he commanded them to stay at Jerusalem, till they "were endued with power from on high." Matthew has omitted the mention of the ascension; and John, you say, has not said a syllable about it. I think otherwise. John has not given an express account of the ascension, but has certainly said something about it; for he informs us, that Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet *ascended* to my Father: but

go to my brethren, and say unto them, "I *ascend* unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." This is surely saying something about the ascension; and if the fact of the ascension be not related by John or Matthew, it may reasonably be supposed, that the omission was made, on account of the notoriety of the fact. That the fact was generally known may be justly collected from the reference which Peter makes to it in the hearing of all the Jews, a very few days after it had happened, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted—" Paul bears testimony also to the ascension when he says, that "Jesus was received up into glory." As to the difference you contend for, between the account of the ascension, as given by Mark and Luke, it does not exist; except in this, that Mark omits the particulars of Jesus going with his apostles to Bethany, and blessing them there; which are mentioned by Luke. But omissions, I must often put you in mind, are not contradictions.

You have now, you say, "gone through the examination of the four books ascribed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; and when it is considered, that the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension, is but a few days, apparently not more than three or four, and that all the circumstances are reported to have happened near the same spot, Jerusalem, it is, I believe, impossible to find, in any story upon record, so many, and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in those books." What am I to say to this? Am I to say, that, in writing this paragraph, you have forfeited your character as an honest man? Or, admitting your honesty, am I to say that you are grossly ignorant of the subject? Let the reader judge. John says, that Jesus appeared to his disciples at Jerusalem on the day of his resurrection, and that Thomas was not then with them. The same John says, that after "eight days" he appeared to them again, when Thomas was with them. Now, Sir, how "apparently three or four days," can be consistent with really "eight days," I leave you to make out. But this is not the whole of John's testimony, either with respect to *place* or *time*; for he says: "After these things (after the two appearances to the disciples at Jerusalem, on the first and on the eighth day after the resurrection), Jesus showed himself again, to his disciples at the sea of Tiberias." The sea of Tiberias, I presume you know, was in Galilee; and Galilee, you may know, was sixty or seventy miles from Jerusalem; it must have taken the disciples some time, after the eighth day, to travel from Jerusalem into Galilee. What, in your own insulting language to the priests, what have you to answer, as to the "same spot Jerusalem," as to your apparently "three or four days?" But this is not all. Luke, in the beginning of the Acts, refers to his Gospel, and says, "Christ showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of the apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Instead of *four*, you perceive there were *forty* days between the crucifixion and the ascension. I

need not, I trust, after this, trouble myself about the falsehoods and contradictions which you impute to the evangelists; your readers cannot but be upon their guard, as to the credit due to your assertions, however bold and improper. You will suffer me to remark, that the evangelists were plain men; who, convinced of the truth of their narration, and conscious of their own integrity, have related what they knew with admirable simplicity. They seem to have said to the Jews of their time, and to say to the Jews and unbelievers of all times, We have told you the truth; and if you will not believe us, we have nothing more to say. Had they been impostors, they would have written with more caution and art, have obviated every cavil, and avoided every appearance of contradiction. This they have not done; and this I consider as a proof of their honesty and veracity.

John the Baptist had given his testimony to the truth of our Saviour's mission in the most unequivocal terms; he afterwards sent two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him whether he was really the expected Messiah or not. Matthew relates both these circumstances: had the writer of the book of Matthew been an impostor, would he have invalidated John's testimony, by bringing forward his real or apparent doubt? Impossible! Matthew, having proved the resurrection of Jesus, tells us, that the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, and "when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted." Would an impostor, in the very last place where he mentions the resurrection, and in the conclusion of his book, have suggested such a cavil to unbelievers, as to say—some doubted? Impossible! The evangelist has left us to collect the reason why some doubted. The disciples saw Jesus, at a distance, on the mountain; and some of them fell down and worshipped him; whilst others doubted whether the person they saw was really Jesus; their doubt, however, could not have lasted long, for in the very next verse we are told, that Jesus came and spake unto them."

Great and laudable pains have been taken by many learned men, to harmonize the several accounts given us by the evangelists of the resurrection. It does not seem to me to be a matter of any great consequence to Christianity, whether the accounts can, in every minute particular, be harmonized or not; since there is no such discordance in them as to render the fact of the resurrection doubtful to any impartial mind. If any man, in a court of justice, should give positive evidence of a fact; and three others should afterwards be examined, and all of them should confirm the evidence of the first as to the fact, but should apparently differ from him and from each other, by being more or less particular in their accounts of the circumstances attending the fact; ought we to doubt of the fact, because we could not harmonize the evidence respecting the circumstances relating to it? The omission of any one circumstance (such as that of Mary Magdalene having gone twice to the sepulchre; or that of the angel having, after he had rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, entered into the sepulchre) may render

a harmony impossible, without having recourse to supposition to supply the defect. You deists laugh at all such attempts, and call them priestcraft. I think it better, then, in arguing with you, to admit that there may be (not granting, however, that there is) an irreconcilable difference between the evangelists in some of their accounts respecting the life of Jesus, or his resurrection. Be it so; what then? Does this difference, admitting it to be real, destroy the credibility of the Gospel history in any of its essential points? Certainly, in my opinion, not. As I look upon this to be a general answer to most of your deistical objections, I profess my sincerity in saying, that I consider it as a true and sufficient answer; and I leave it to your consideration. I have, purposely, in the whole of this discussion, been silent as to the inspiration of the evangelists; well knowing that you would have rejected, with scorn, any thing I could have said on that point: but, in disputing with a deist, I do most solemnly contend, that the Christian religion is true, and worthy of all acceptation, whether the evangelists were inspired or not.

Unbelievers, in general, wish to conceal their sentiments; they have a decent respect for public opinion; are cautious of affronting the religion of their country; fearful of undermining the foundations of civil society. Some few have been more daring, but less judicious; and have, without disguise, professed their unbelief. But you are the first who ever swore that he was an infidel, concluding your deistical creed with—So help me God! I pray that God may help you; that he may, through the influence of his Holy Spirit, bring you to a right mind; convert you to the religion of his Son, whom, out of his abundant love to mankind, he sent into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You swear, that you think the Christian religion is not true. I give full credit to your oath; it is an oath in confirmation—of what? Of an opinion. It proves the sincerity of your declaration of your opinion; but the opinion, notwithstanding the oath, may be either true or false. Permit me to produce to you an oath not confirming an opinion, but a fact; it is the oath of St. Paul, when he swears to the Galatians, that in what he told them of his miraculous conversion he did not tell a lie: "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not:" do but give that credit to Paul which I give to you, do but consider the difference between an opinion and a fact, and I shall not despair of your becoming a Christian.

Deism, you say, consists in a belief of one God, and an imitation of his moral character, or the practice of what is called virtue; and in this (as far as religion is concerned) you rest all your hopes. There is nothing in deism but what is in Christianity, but there is much in Christianity which is not in deism. The Christian has no doubt concerning a future state; every deist, from Plato to Thomas Paine, is on this subject overwhelmed with doubts insuperable by human reason. The Christian has no misgivings as to the pardon of penitent sinners, through the intercession of a mediator; the

deist is harassed with apprehension, lest the moral justice of God should demand, with inexorable rigor, punishment for transgression. The Christian has no doubt concerning the lawfulness and the efficacy of prayer; the deist is disturbed on this point by abstract considerations concerning the goodness of God, which wants not to be entreated; concerning his foresight, which has no need of our information; concerning his immutability, which cannot be changed through our supplication. The Christian admits the providence of God, and the liberty of human actions; the deist is involved in great difficulties, when he undertakes the proof of either. The Christian has assurance, that the Spirit of God will help his infirmities; the deist does not deny the possibility, that God may have access to the human mind, but he has no ground to believe the fact of his either enlightening the understanding, influencing the will, or purifying the heart.

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## LETTER IX.

"THOSE," you say, "who are not much acquainted with ecclesiastical history, may suppose, that the book called the New Testament has existed ever since the time of Jesus Christ, but the fact is historically otherwise; there was no such book as the New Testament till more than three hundred years after the time that Christ is said to have lived." This paragraph is calculated to mislead common readers; it is necessary to unfold its meaning. The book, called the New Testament, consists of twenty-seven different parts; concerning seven of these, *viz.* the Epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second of John, the third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelations, there were at first some doubts; and the question, whether they should be received into the canon, might be decided, as all questions concerning opinions must be, by vote. With respect to the other twenty parts, those who are most acquainted with ecclesiastical history will tell you, as Du Pin does after Eusebius, that they were owned as canonical at all times, and by all Christians. Whether the council of Laodicea was held before or after that of Nice, is not a settled point; all the books of the New Testament, except the Revelation, are enumerated as canonical in the Constitutions of that council; but it is a great mistake to suppose, that the greatest part of the books of the New Testament, were not in general use among Christians, long before the council of Laodicea was held. This is not merely my opinion on the subject, it is the opinion of one much better acquainted with ecclesiastical history than I am; and, probably, than you are—Mosheim. "The opinions," says this author, "or rather the conjectures, of the learned, concerning the time when the books of the New Testament were collected into one volume, as also about the authors of

that collection, are extremely different. This important question is attended with great and almost insuperable difficulties to us in these latter times. It is, however, sufficient for us to know, that, before the middle of the second century, the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. Hence it appears, that these sacred writings were carefully separated from several human compositions upon the same subject, either by some of the apostles themselves, who lived so long, or by their disciples and successors, who were spread abroad through all nations. We are well assured, that the *four Gospels* were collected during the life of St. John, and that the three first received the approbation of this divine apostle. And why may we not suppose, that the other books of the New Testament were gathered together at the same time? What renders this highly probable is, that the most urgent necessity required its being done. For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons, whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared, which were imposed on the world by fraudulent men as the writings of the holy apostles. These apocryphal and spurious writings must have produced a sad confusion, and rendered both the history and the doctrine of Christ uncertain, had not the rulers of the church used all possible care and diligence in separating the books, that were truly apostolical and divine, from all that spurious trash, and conveying them down to posterity in one volume."

Did you ever read the apology for the Christians, which Justin Martyr presented to the emperor Antoninus Pius, to the senate, and people of Rome? I should sooner expect a falsity in a petition, which any body of persecuted men, imploring justice, should present to the king and parliament of Great Britain, than in this apology. Yet in this apology, which was presented not fifty years after the death of St. John, not only parts of all the four Gospels are quoted, but it is expressly said, that on the day called Sunday a portion of them was read in the public assemblies of the Christians. I forbear pursuing this matter further, else it might easily be shown, that probably the Gospels, and certainly some of St. Paul's epistles, were known to Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp, contemporaries with the apostles. These men could not quote or refer to books which did not exist; and therefore, though you could make it out, that the book called the New Testament did not formally exist under that title till three hundred and fifty years after Christ, yet I hold it to be a certain fact, that all the books of which it is composed were written, and most of them received by all Christians, within a few years after his death.

You raise a difficulty relative to the time which intervened between the death and resurrection of Jesus, who had said, that the Son of Man should be three days and three nights in the heart of

the earth. Are you ignorant, then, that the Jews used the phrase three days and three nights, to denote what we understand by three days? It is said in Genesis, chap. vii. 12, "The rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and this is equivalent to the expression (ver 17.) "And the flood was forty days upon the earth." Instead then of saying, three days and three nights, let us simply say three days; and you will not object to Christ's being three days, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, in the heart of the earth. I do not say that he was in the grave the whole of either Friday or Sunday; but a hundred instances might be produced, from writers of all nations, in which a part of a day is spoken of as the whole. Thus much for the defence of the historical part of the New Testament.

You have introduced an account of Faustus, as denying the genuineness of the books of the New Testament. Will you permit that great scholar in sacred literature, Michaelis, to tell you something about this Faustus? "He was ignorant, as were most of the African writers, of the Greek language, and acquainted with the New Testament merely through the channel of the Latin translation: he was not only devoid of a sufficient fund of learning, but illiterate in the highest degree. An argument which he brings against the genuineness of the Gospel affords sufficient ground for this assertion; for he contends, that the Gospel of St. Matthew could not have been written by St. Matthew himself, because he is always mentioned in the third person." You know who has argued like Faustus, but I did not think myself authorized on that account to call you illiterate in the highest degree; but Michaelis makes a still more severe conclusion concerning Faustus, and he extends his observation to every man who argued like him. "A man capable of such an argument must have been ignorant, not only of the Greek writers, the knowledge of which could not have been expected from Faustus, but even of the Commentaries of Cæsar. And were it thought improbable, that so heavy a charge could be laid with justice on the side of his knowledge, it would fall with double weight on the side of his honesty, and induce us to suppose, that, preferring the arts of sophistry to the plainness of truth, he maintained opinions which he believed to be false." (Marsh's Transl.) Never more, I think, shall we hear of Moses not being the author of the Pentateuch, on account of its being written in the third person.

Not being able to produce any argument to render questionable either the genuineness or the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, you tell us, that "it is a matter of no great importance by whom they were written, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument: he does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them." That Paul had so far resisted the evidence which the apostles had given of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, as to be a persecutor of the disciples of Christ, is certain; but I do not remember the place where

he declares that he had not believed them. The high priest and the senate of the children of Israel did not deny the reality of the miracles which had been wrought by Peter and the apostles; they did not contradict their testimony concerning the resurrection and the ascension; but whether they believed it or not, they were fired with indignation, and took counsel to put the apostles to death: and this was also the temper of Paul; whether he believed or did not believe the story of the resurrection, he was exceedingly mad against the saints. The writer of Paul's Epistles does not attempt to prove his doctrine by argument; he in many places tells us, that his doctrine was not taught him by man, or any invention of his own, which required the ingenuity of argument to prove it: "I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel, which was preached of me, is not after man; for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul does not pretend to have been a witness of the *story* of the resurrection, but he does much more; he asserts, that he was himself a witness of the resurrection. After enumerating many appearances of Jesus to his disciples, Paul says of himself, "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Whether you will admit Paul to have been a *true* witness or not, you cannot deny that he pretends to have been a witness of the resurrection.

The story of his being struck to the ground, as he was journeying to Damascus, has nothing in it, you say, miraculous or extraordinary: you represent him as struck by lightning. It is somewhat extraordinary for a man, who is struck by lightning, to have, at the very time, full possession of his understanding; to hear a voice issuing from the lightning, speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue, calling him by his name, and entering into conversation with him. His companions, you say, appear not to have suffered in the same manner: the greater the wonder. If it was a common storm of thunder and lightning which struck Paul and all his companions to the ground, it is somewhat extraordinary that he alone should be hurt; and that, notwithstanding his being struck blind by lightning, he should in other respects be so little hurt, as to be immediately able to walk into the city of Damascus. So difficult is it to oppose truth by an hypothesis! In the character of Paul you discover a great deal of violence and fanaticism; and such men, you observe, are never good moral evidences of any doctrine they teach. Read, Sir, Lord Lyttleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, and I think you will be convinced of the contrary. That elegant writer thus expresses his opinion on this subject: "Besides all the proofs of the Christian religion, which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connexion it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I think the conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, is, of itself, a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation." I hope this opinion will have some weight with you; it is not the opinion of a lying



Bible-prophet, of a stupid evangelist, or of an *a b ab* priest, but of a learned layman, whose illustrious rank received splendor from his talents.

You are displeased with St. Paul "for setting out to prove the resurrection of the *same* body." You know, I presume, that the resurrection of the same body is not, by all, admitted to be a scriptural doctrine. "In the New Testament (wherein, I think, are contained all the articles of the Christian faith), I find our Saviour and the apostles to preach the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection from the dead, in many places; but I do not remember any place where the resurrection of the same body is so much as mentioned." This observation of Mr. Locke I so far adopt, as to deny that you can produce any place in the writings of St. Paul, wherein he sets out to prove the resurrection of the same body. I do not question the possibility of the resurrection of the same body, and I am not ignorant of the manner in which some learned men have explained it (somewhat after the way of your vegetative speck in the kernel of a peach); but as you are discrediting St. Paul's doctrine, you ought to show, that what you attempt to discredit is the doctrine of the apostle. As a matter of choice, you had rather have a better body—you will have a better body, "your natural body will be raised a spiritual body," your corruptible will put on incorruption. You are so much out of humor with your present body, that you inform us, every animal in the creation excels us in something. Now I had always thought, that the single circumstance of our having hands, and their having none, gave us an infinite superiority, not only over insects, fishes, snails, and spiders (which you represent as excelling us in locomotive powers), but over all the animals of the creation; and enabled us, in the language of Cicero, describing the manifold utility of our hands, to make as it were a new nature of things. As to what you say about the consciousness of existence being the only conceivable idea of a future life, it proves nothing, either for or against the resurrection of a body, or of the same body; it does not inform us, whether to any or to what substance, material or immaterial, this consciousness is annexed. I leave it, however, to others, who do not admit personal identity to consist in consciousness, to dispute with you on this point, and willingly subscribe to the opinion of Mr. Locke, "that nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person."

From a caterpillar's passing into a torpid state resembling death, and afterwards appearing a splendid butterfly, and from the (supposed) consciousness of existence which the animal had in these different states, you ask, Why must I believe, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in me the consciousness of existence hereafter? I do not dislike analogical reasoning, when applied to proper objects and kept within due bounds; but where is it said in Scripture, that the resurrection of the same body is necessary to continue in you the consciousness of existence? Those, who admit a conscious state of the soul between death and the resurrection, will contend, that the soul is the substance in which

consciousness is continued without interruption: those, who deny the intermediate state of the soul as a state of consciousness, will contend, that consciousness is not destroyed by death, but suspended by it, as it is suspended during a sound sleep, and that it may as easily be restored after death as after sleep, during which the faculties of the soul are not extinct but dormant. Those, who think that the soul is nothing distinct from the compages of the body, not a substance but a mere quality, will maintain, that the consciousness appertaining to every individual person is not lost when the body is destroyed; that it is known to God, and may, at the general resurrection, be annexed to any system of matter he may think fit, or to that particular compages to which it belonged in this life.

In reading your book I have been frequently shocked at the virulence of your zeal, at the indecorum of your abuse, in applying vulgar and offensive epithets to men, who have been held, and who will long, I trust, continue to be holden, in high estimation. I know that the scar of calumny is seldom wholly effaced, it remains long after the wound is healed; and your abuse of holy men and holy things will be remembered when your arguments against them are refuted and forgotten. Moses you term an arrogant coxcomb, a chief assassin; Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, monsters and impostors; the Jewish kings, a parcel of rascals; Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets, liars; and Paul a fool, for having written one of the sublimest compositions, and on the most important subject, that ever occupied the mind of man—the lesson in our burial service: this lesson you call a doubtful jargon, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of the bell at the funeral. Men of low condition! pressed down, as you often are, by calamities generally incident to human nature, and groaning under burthens of misery peculiar to your condition, what thought you when you heard this lesson read at the funeral of your child, your parent, or your friend? Was it mere jargon to you, as destitute of meaning as the tolling of a bell? No. You understood from it, that you would not all sleep, but that you would all be changed in a moment at the last trump; you understood from it, that this corruptible must put on incorruption, that this mortal must put on immortality, and that death would be swallowed up in victory; you understood from it, that if (notwithstanding profane attempts to subvert your faith) ye continue stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, your labor will not be in vain.

You seem fond of displaying your skill in science and philosophy; you speak more than once of Euclid; and, in censuring St. Paul, you intimate to us, that when the apostle says, "one star differeth from another star in glory," he ought to have said, in distance. All men see that one star differeth from another star in glory or brightness; but few men know, that their difference in brightness arises from their difference in distance; and I beg leave to say, that even you, philosopher as you are, do not know it. You make an assumption, which you cannot prove, that the stars are equal in magnitude, and placed at different distances from the earth; but you cannot

prove that they are not different in magnitude, and placed at equal distances, though none of them may be so near to the earth as to have any sensible annual parallax. I beg pardon of my readers for touching upon this subject; but it really moves one's indignation, to see a smattering in philosophy urged as an argument against the veracity of an apostle. "Little learning is a dangerous thing."

Paul, you say, affects to be a naturalist; and to prove (you might more properly have said illustrate) his system of resurrection from the principles of vegetation: "Thou fool," says he, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die:" to which one might reply, in his own language, and say, "Thou fool, Paul, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die not." It may be seen, I think, from this passage, who affects to be a naturalist, to be acquainted with the microscopical discoveries of modern times; which were probably neither known to Paul, nor to the Corinthians; and which, had they been known to them both, would have been of little use in the illustration of the subject of the resurrection. Paul said, "that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." Every husbandman in Corinth, though unable, perhaps, to define the term death, would understand the apostle's phrase in a popular sense, and agree with him, that a grain of wheat must become rotten in the ground before it could sprout; and that, as God raised from a rotten grain of wheat, the roots, the stem, the leaves, the ear of a new plant, he might also cause a new body to spring up from the rotten carcass in the grave. Doctor Clarke observes, "In like manner as in every grain of corn there is contained a minute, insensible seminal principle, which is itself the entire future blade and ear, and in due season, when all the rest of the grain is corrupted, evolves and unfolds itself visibly to the eye; so our present mortal and corruptible body may be but the *exuviae*, as it were, of some hidden, and, at present, insensible principle (possibly the present seat of the soul), which, at the resurrection, shall discover itself in its proper form." I do not agree with this great man (for such I esteem him) in this philosophical conjecture; but the quotation may serve to show you, that the germ does not evolve and unfold itself visibly to the eye till all the rest of the grain is corrupted; that is, in the language and meaning of St. Paul, till it dies. Though the authority of Jesus may have as little weight with you as that of Paul, yet it may not be improper to quote to you our Saviour's expression, when he foretells the numerous disciples which his death would produce: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." You perceive from this, that the Jews thought the death of the grain was necessary to its reproduction. Hence, every one may see what little reason you had to object to the apostle's popular illustration of the possibility of a resurrection. Had he known as much as any naturalist in Europe does, of the progress of an animal from one state to another, as from a worm to a butterfly (which, you think, applies to the case), I am of opinion he would not have used that

illustration in preference to what he has used, which is obvious and satisfactory.

Whether the fourteen epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him or not, is, in your judgment, a matter of indifference. So far from being a matter of indifference, I consider the genuineness of St. Paul's epistles to be a matter of the greatest importance; for, if the epistles ascribed to Paul were written by him (and there is unquestionable proof that they were,) it will be difficult for you, or for any man, upon fair principles of sound reasoning, to deny that the Christian religion is true. The argument is a short one, and obvious to every capacity. It stands thus:—St. Paul wrote several letters to those whom, in different countries, he had converted to the Christian faith; in these letters he affirms two things:—First, that he had wrought miracles in their presence. Secondly, that many of themselves had received the gift of tongues, and other miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. The persons to whom these letters were addressed must, on reading them, have certainly known, whether Paul affirmed what was true, or told a plain lie; they must have known, whether they had seen him work miracles; they must have been conscious, whether they themselves did or did not possess any miraculous gifts. Now can you, or any man, believe for a moment, that Paul (a man, certainly, of great abilities) would have written public letters, full of lies, and which could not fail of being discovered to be lies, as soon as his letters were read? Paul could not be guilty of falsehood in these two points, or in either of them; and if either of them be true, the Christian religion is true. References to these two points are frequent in St. Paul's epistles. I will mention only a few. In his Epistle to the Galatians, he says (chap. iii. 2—5.) "This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit (gifts of the Spirit) by the works of the law? He ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you." To the Thessalonians he says (1 Thess. chap. i. 5.) "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost." To the Corinthians he thus expresses himself (1 Cor. ii. 4.) "My preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" and he adds the reason for his working miracles, "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." With what alacrity would the faction at Corinth, which opposed the apostle, have laid hold of this and many similar declarations in the letter, had they been able to have detected any falsehood in them? There is no need to multiply words on so clear a point; the genuineness of Paul's Epistles proves their authenticity, independently of every other proof; for it is absurd in the extreme to suppose him, under circumstances of obvious detection, capable of advancing what was not true; and if Paul's Epistles be both genuine and authentic, the Christian religion is true. Think of this argument.

You close your observations in the following manner:—"Should the Bible (meaning, as I have before remarked, the Old Testament)

and Testament hereafter fall, it is not I that have been the occasion." You look, I think, upon your production with a parent's partial eye, when you speak of it in such a style of self-complacency. The Bible, Sir, has withstood the learning of Porphyry, and the power of Julian, to say nothing of the Manichean Faustus; it has resisted the genius of Bolingbroke, and the wit of Voltaire, to say nothing of a numerous herd of inferior assailants; and it will not fall by your force. You have barbed anew the blunted arrows of former adversaries; you have feathered them with blasphemy and ridicule; dipped them in your deadliest poison; aimed them with your utmost skill; shot them against the shield of faith with your utmost vigor; but, like the feeble javelin of aged Priam, they will scarcely reach the mark, will fall to the ground without a stroke.

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### LETTER X.

THE remaining part of your work can hardly be made the subject of animadversion. It principally consists of unsupported assertions, abusive appellations, illiberal sarcasms, "strifes of words, profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called." I am hurt at being, in mere justice to the subject, under the necessity of using such harsh language; and am sincerely sorry, that, from what cause I know not, your mind has received a wrong bias in every point respecting revealed religion. You are capable of better things; for there is a philosophical sublimity in some of your ideas, when you speak of the Supreme Being, as the Creator of the universe. That you may not accuse me of disrespect, in passing over any part of your work, without bestowing proper attention upon it, I will wait upon you through what you call your conclusion.

You refer your reader to the former part of the *Age of Reason*; in which you have spoken of what you esteem three frauds, mystery, miracle, and prophecy. I have not at hand the book to which you refer, and know not what you have said on these subjects; they are subjects of great importance, and we, probably, should differ essentially in our opinion concerning them; but, I confess, I am not sorry to be excused from examining what you have said on these points. The specimen of your reasoning, which is now before me, has taken from me every inclination to trouble either my reader, or myself, with any observations on your former book.

You admit the possibility of God's revealing his will to man; yet "the thing so revealed," you say, "is revelation to the person only to whom it is made; his account of it to another is not revelation." This is true; his account is simple testimony. You add, there is no "possible criterion to judge of the truth of what he

says." This I positively deny; and contend, that a real miracle, performed in attestation of a revealed truth, is a certain criterion by which we may judge of the truth of that attestation. I am perfectly aware of the objections which may be made to this position; I have examined them with care; I acknowledge them to be of weight; but I do not speak unadvisedly, or as wishing to dictate to other men, when I say, that I am persuaded the position is true. So thought Moses, when, in the matter of Korah, he said to the Israelites, "If these men die the common death of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me." So thought Elijah, when he said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant;" and the people, before whom he spake, were of the same opinion; for, when the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, they said, "The Lord he is the God." So thought our Saviour, when he said, "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me;" and, "if I do not the works of my Father, believe me not." What reason have we to believe Jesus speaking in the Gospel, and to disbelieve Mahomet speaking in the Koran? Both of them lay claim to a Divine commission; and yet we receive the words of the one as a revelation from God, and we reject the words of the other as an imposture of man. The reason is evident; Jesus established his pretensions, not by alleging any secret communication with the Deity, but by working numerous and indubitable miracles in the presence of thousands, and which the most bitter and watchful of his enemies could not disallow; but Mahomet wrought no miracles at all: nor is a miracle the only criterion by which we may judge of the truth of a revelation. If a series of prophets should, through a course of many centuries, predict the appearance of a certain person, whom God would at a particular time send into the world for a particular end, and at length a person should appear, in whom all the predictions were minutely accomplished; such a completion of prophecy would be a criterion of the truth of that revelation which that person should deliver to mankind. Or if a person should now say (as many false prophets have said, and are daily saying), that he had a commission to declare the will of God; and, as a proof of his veracity, should predict, that, after his death, he would rise from the dead on the third day; the completion of such a prophecy would, I presume, be a sufficient criterion of the truth of what this man might have said concerning the will of God. "Now I tell you (says Jesus to his disciples, concerning Judas, who was to betray him) before it come, that when it is come to pass ye may believe that I am he." In various parts of the Gospels our Saviour, with the utmost propriety, claims to be received as the messenger of God, not only from the miracles which he wrought, but from the prophecies which were fulfilled in his person, and from the predictions which he himself delivered. Hence, instead of there being no criterion by which we may judge of the truth of the Christian revelation, there are clearly three. It is an easy matter to use an indecorous flippancy of language in speaking of the Christian religion

and with a supercilious negligence to class Christ and *his* apostles amongst the impostors who have figured in the world ; but it is not, I think, an easy matter for any man of good sense and sound erudition, to make an impartial examination into any one of the three grounds of Christianity which I have here mentioned, and to reject it.

What is it, you ask, the Bible teaches? The prophet Micah shall answer you: it teaches us "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God;"—justice, mercy, and piety, instead of what you contend for—rapine, cruelty, and murder. What is it, you demand, the Testament teaches us? You answer your question—to believe that the Almighty committed debauchery with a woman. Absurd and impious assertion! No, Sir, no; this profane doctrine, this miserable stuff, this blasphemous perversion of Scripture, is your doctrine, not that of the New Testament. I will tell you the lesson which it teaches to infidels as well as to believers; it is a lesson which philosophy never taught, which wit cannot ridicule, nor sophistry disprove; the lesson is this: "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live: all that are in their graves shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

The moral precepts of the Gospel are so well fitted to promote the happiness of mankind in this world, and to prepare human nature for the future enjoyment of that blessedness, of which, in our present state, we can form no conception, that I had no expectation they would have met with your disapprobation. You say, however, "As to the scraps of morality that are irregularly and thinly scattered in those books, they make no part of the pretended thing, revealed religion." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Is this a scrap of morality? Is it not rather the concentrated essence of all ethics, the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty towards each other may be derived? Duties, you know, are distinguished by moralists into duties of perfect and imperfect obligation: does the Bible teach you nothing, when it instructs you, that this distinction is done away? when it bids you "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." These, and precepts such as these, you will in vain look for in the codes of Frederic or Justinian; you cannot find them in our statute-books; they were not taught, nor are they taught, in the schools of heathen philosophy; or, if some one or two of them should chance to be glanced at by a Plato, a Seneca, or a Cicero, they are not bound upon the consciences of mankind by any sanction. It is in the Gospel, and in the Gospel alone, that we learn their importance; acts of benevolence and brotherly love may be to an unbeliever voluntary acts, to a Christian they are indispensable duties. Is a new commandment no part of revealed religion? "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another;" the law of Christian benevolence is enjoined us by Christ himself in the most

solemn manner, as the distinguishing badge of our being his disciples.

Two precepts you particularize as inconsistent with the dignity and the nature of man—that of not resenting injuries, and that of loving enemies. Who but yourself ever interpreted literally the proverbial phrase, “If a man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also?” Did Jesus himself turn the other cheek when the officer of the high priest smote him? It is evident, that a patient acquiescence under slight personal injuries is here enjoined; and that a proneness to revenge, which instigates men to savage acts of brutality, for every trifling offence, is forbidden. As to loving enemies, it is explained in another place to mean, the doing them all the good in our power; “if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;” and what think you is more likely to preserve peace, and to promote kind affections amongst men, than the returning good for evil? Christianity does not order us to love in proportion to the injury—“it does not offer a premium for a crime;” it orders us to let our benevolence extend alike to all, that we may emulate the benignity of God himself, who maketh “his sun to rise on the evil and on the good.”

In the law of Moses, retaliation for deliberate injuries had been ordained—“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Aristotle, in his treatise of morals, says, that some thought retaliation of personal wrongs an equitable proceeding. Rhadamanthus is said to have given it his sanction; the decemviral laws allowed it; the common law of England did not forbid it; and it is said to be still the law of some countries, even in Christendom: but the mild spirit of Christianity absolutely prohibits, not only the retaliation of injuries, but the indulgence of every resentful propensity.

“It has been,” you affirm, “the scheme of the Christian church to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of government to hold him in ignorance of his rights.” I appeal to the plain sense of any honest man to judge whether this representation be true in either particular. When he attends the service of the church, does he discover any design in the minister to keep him in ignorance of his Creator? Are not the public prayers in which he joins, the lessons which are read to him, the sermons which are preached to him, all calculated to impress upon his mind a strong conviction of the mercy, justice, holiness, power, and wisdom of the one adorable God, blessed for ever? By these means, which the Christian church hath provided for our instruction, I will venture to say, that the most unlearned congregation of Christians in Great Britain have more just and sublime conceptions of the Creator, a more perfect knowledge of their duty towards him, and a stronger inducement to the practice of virtue, holiness, and temperance, than all the philosophers of all the heathen countries in the world ever had, or now have. If, indeed, your scheme should take place, and men should no longer believe their Bible, then would they soon become as ignorant of the Creator as all the world was when God called Abraham from his kindred; and as all the world, which has had no com-



munication with either Jews or Christians, now is. Then would they soon bow down to stocks and stones, kiss their hand (as they did in the time of Job, and as the poor African does now) to "the moon walking in brightness, and deny the God that is above;" then would they worship Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus, and emulate, in the transcendent flagitiousness of their lives, the impure morals of their gods.

What design has government to keep men in ignorance of their rights? None whatever. All wise statesmen are persuaded, that the more men know of their rights, the better subjects they will become. Subjects, not from necessity but choice, are the firmest friends of every government. The people of Great Britain are well acquainted with their natural and social rights; they understand them better than the people of any other country do; they know that they have a right to be free, not only from the capricious tyranny of any one man's will, but from the more afflicting despotism of republican factions; and it is this very knowledge which attaches them to the constitution of their country. I have no fear that the people should know too much of their rights; my fear is that they should not know them in all their relations, and to their full extent. The government does not desire that men should remain in ignorance of their rights; but it both desires and requires, that they should not disturb the public peace under vain pretences; that they should make themselves acquainted, not merely with the rights, but with the duties also of men in civil society. I am far from ridiculing (as some have done) the rights of man; I have long ago understood, that the poor as well as the rich, and that the rich as well as the poor, have, by nature, some rights, which no human government can justly take from them, without their tacit or express consent; and some also, which they themselves have no power to surrender to any government. One of the principal rights of man, in a state either of nature or of society, is a right of property in the fruits of his industry, ingenuity, or good fortune. Does government hold any man in ignorance of this right? So much the contrary, that the chief care of government is to declare, ascertain, modify, and defend this right; nay, it gives right, where nature gives none; it protects the goods of an intestate; and it allows a man, at his death, to dispose of that property, which the law of nature would cause to revert into the common stock. Sincerely as I am attached to the liberties of mankind, I cannot but profess myself an utter enemy to that spurious philosophy, that democratic insanity, which would equalize all property, and level all distinctions in civil society. Personal distinctions, arising from superior probity, learning, eloquence, skill, courage, and from every other excellency of talents, are the very blood and nerves of the body politic; they animate the whole, and invigorate every part; without them, its bones would become reeds, and its marrow water; it would presently sink into a fetid, senseless mass of corruption. Power may be used for private ends, and in opposition to the public good; rank may be improperly conferred, and insolently sustained: riches may

be wickedly acquired, and viciously applied: but as this is neither necessarily nor generally the case, I cannot agree with those, who, in asserting the natural equality of man, spurn the instituted distinctions attending power, rank, and riches. But I mean not to enter into any discussion on this subject, farther than to say, that your crimination of government appears to me to be wholly unfounded; and to express my hope, that no one individual will be so far misled by disquisitions on the rights of man, as to think that he has any right to do wrong, or to forget that other men have rights as well as he.

You are animated with proper sentiments of piety, when you speak of the structure of the universe. No one, indeed, who considers it with attention, can fail of having his mind filled with the supremest veneration for its author. Who can contemplate, without astonishment, the motion of a comet, running far beyond the orb of Saturn, endeavoring to escape into the pathless regions of unbounded space, yet feeling, at its utmost distance, the attractive influence of the sun; hearing, as it were, the voice of God arresting its progress, and compelling it, after a lapse of ages, to reiterate its ancient course? Who can comprehend the distance of the stars from the earth, and from each other? It is so great, that it mocks our conception; our very imagination is terrified, confounded, and lost, when we are told, that a ray of light, which moves at the rate of above ten millions of miles in a minute, will not, though emitted at this instant from the brightest star, reach the earth in less than six years. We think this earth a great globe; and we see the sad wickedness which individuals are often guilty of, in scraping together a little of its dirt; we view, with still greater astonishment and horror, the mighty ruin which has, in all ages, been brought upon human kind, by the low ambition of contending powers, to acquire a temporary possession of a little portion of its surface. But how does the whole of this globe sink, as it were, to nothing, when we consider, that a million of earths will scarcely equal the bulk of the sun; that all the stars are suns; and that millions of suns constitute, probably, but a minute portion of that material world, which God hath distributed through the immensity of space! Systems, however, of insensible matter, though arranged in exquisite order, prove only the wisdom and the power of the great Architect of nature. As percipient beings, we look for something more; for his goodness; and we cannot open our eyes without seeing it.

Every portion of the earth, sea, and air, is full of sensitive beings, capable, in their respective orders, of enjoying the good things which God has prepared for their comfort. All the orders of beings are enabled to propagate their kind; and thus provision is made for a successive continuation of happiness. Individuals yield to the law of dissolution inseparable from the material structure of their bodies: but no gap is thereby left in existence; their place is occupied by other individuals, capable of participating in the goodness of the Almighty. Contemplations such as these fill the mind with humility, benevolence, and piety. But why should we stop here?

why not contemplate the goodness of God in the redemption, as well as in the creation of the world? By the death of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ, he hath redeemed the whole human race from the eternal death, which the transgression of Adam had entailed on all his posterity. You believe nothing about the transgression of Adam. The history of Eve and the serpent excites your contempt; you will not admit that it is either a real history, or an allegorical representation of death entering into the world through disobedience to the command of God. Be it so. You find, however, that death doth reign over all mankind, by whatever mean it was introduced; this is not a matter of belief, but of lamentable knowledge. The New Testament tells us, that, through the merciful dispensation of God, Christ hath overcome death, and restored man to that immortality which Adam had lost. This also you refuse to believe. Why? Because you cannot account for the propriety of this redemption. Miserable reason! stupid objection! What is there that you can account for? Not for the germination of a blade of grass, not for the fall of a leaf of the forest; and will you refuse to eat of the fruits of the earth, because God has not given you wisdom equal to his own? Will you refuse to lay hold on immortality, because he has not given you, because he, probably, could not give to such a being as man, a full manifestation of the end for which he designs him, nor of the means requisite for the attainment of that end? What father of a family can make level to the apprehension of his infant children, all the views of happiness which his paternal goodness is preparing for them? How can he explain to them the utility of reproof, correction, instruction, example, of all the various means by which he forms their minds to piety, temperance, and probity? We are children in the hand of God; we are in the very infancy of our existence, just separated from the womb of eternal duration; it may not be possible for the Father of the universe to explain to us (infants in apprehension) the goodness and the wisdom of his dealings with the sons of men. What qualities of mind will be necessary for our well-doing through all eternity, we know not; what discipline in this infancy of existence may be necessary for generating these qualities, we know not; whether God could or could not consistently with the general good, have forgiven the transgression of Adam, without any atonement, we know not; whether the malignity of sin be not so great, so opposite to the general good, that it cannot be forgiven whilst it exists, that is, whilst the mind retains a propensity to it, we know not; so that if there should be much greater difficulty in comprehending the mode of God's moral government of mankind than there really is, there would be no reason for doubting of its rectitude. If the whole human race be considered as but one small member of a large community of free and intelligent beings of different orders, and if this whole community be subject to discipline and laws productive of the greatest possible good to the whole system, then may we still more reasonably suspect our capacity to comprehend the wisdom

and goodness of all God's proceedings in the moral government of the universe.

You are lavish in your praise of deism; it is so much better than atheism, that I mean not to say any thing to its discredit; it is not, however, without its difficulties. What think you of an uncaused cause of every thing? of a Being who has no relation to time, not being older to-day than he was yesterday, nor younger to-day than he will be to-morrow? who has no relation to space, not being a part here and a part there, or a whole anywhere? What think you of an omniscient Being, who cannot know the future actions of a man? Or, if his omniscience enables him to know them, what think you of the contingency of human actions? And if human actions are not contingent, what think you of the morality of actions, of the distinction between vice and virtue, crime and innocence, sin and duty? What think you of the infinite goodness of a Being, who existed through eternity, without any emanation of his goodness manifested in the creation of sensitive beings? Or, if you contend that there has been an eternal creation, what think you of an effect coeval with its cause, of matter not posterior to its Maker? What think you of the existence of evil, moral and natural, in the work of an infinite Being, powerful, wise, and good? What think you of the gift of freedom of will, when the abuse of freedom becomes the cause of general misery? I could propose to your consideration a great many other questions of a similar tendency, the contemplation of which has driven not a few from deism to atheism, just as the difficulties in revealed religion have driven yourself, and some others, from Christianity to deism.

For my own part, I can see no reason why either revealed or natural religion should be abandoned, on account of the difficulties which attend either of them. I look up to the incomprehensible Maker of heaven and earth with unspeakable admiration and self-annihilation, and am a deist. I contemplate, with the utmost gratitude and humility of mind, his unsearchable wisdom and goodness in the redemption of the world from eternal death, through the intervention of his Son Jesus Christ, and am a Christian. As a deist, I have little expectation; as a Christian, I have no doubt of a future state. I speak for myself, and may be in an error, as to the ground of the first part of this opinion. You, and other men, may conclude differently. From the inert nature of matter, from the faculties of the human mind, from the apparent imperfection of God's moral government of the world, from many modes of analogical reasoning and from other sources, some of the philosophers of antiquity did collect, and modern philosophers may, perhaps, collect a strong probability of a future existence; and not only of a future existence but (which is quite a distinct question) of a future state of retribution, proportioned to our moral conduct in this world. Far be it from me to loosen any of the obligations to virtue; but I must confess, that I cannot, from the same sources of argumentation, derive any positive assurance on the subject. Think then with what thankfulness of heart I receive the word of God, which tells me,

that though "in Adam (by the condition of our nature) all die;" yet "in Christ (by the covenant of grace) shall all be made alive." I lay hold on "eternal life as the gift of God through Jesus Christ;" I consider it not as any appendage to the nature I derive from Adam, but as the free gift of the Almighty, through his Son, whom he hath constituted Lord of all, the Saviour, the Advocate, and the Judge of human kind.

"Deism," you affirm, "teaches us, without the possibility of being mistaken, all that is necessary or proper to be known." There are three things, which all reasonable men admit are necessary and proper to be known; the being of God; the providence of God; a future state of retribution. Whether these three truths are so taught us by deism, that there is no possibility of being mistaken concerning any of them, let the history of philosophy, and of idolatry, and superstition, in all ages and countries, determine. A volume might be filled with an account of the mistakes into which the greatest reasoners have fallen, and of the uncertainty in which they lived, with respect to every one of these points. I will advert, briefly, only to the last of them. Notwithstanding the illustrious labors of Gassendi, Cudworth, Clarke, Baxter, and of above two hundred other modern writers on the subject, the *natural* mortality or immortality of the human soul is as little understood by us, as it was by the philosophers of Greece or Rome. The opposite opinions of Plato and of Epicurus, on this subject, have their several supporters amongst the learned of the present age, in Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, in every enlightened part of the world; and they, who have been most seriously occupied in the study of the question concerning a future state, as deducible from the nature of the human soul, are least disposed to give, from reason, a positive decision of it either way. The importance of revelation is by nothing rendered more apparent, than by the discordant sentiments of learned and good men (for I speak not of the ignorant and immoral) on this point. They show the insufficiency of human reason, in a course of above two thousand years, to unfold the mysteries of human nature, and to furnish, from the contemplation of it, any assurance of the quality of our future condition. If you should ever become persuaded of this insufficiency (and you can scarce fail of becoming so, if you examine the matter deeply), you will, if you act rationally, be disposed to investigate, with seriousness and impartiality, the truth of Christianity. You will say of the Gospel, as the Northumbrian heathens said to Paulinus, by whom they were converted to the Christian religion; "The more we reflect on the nature of our soul, the less we know of it. Whilst it animates our body, we may know some of its properties; but when once separated, we know not whither it goes, or from whence it came. Since, then, the Gospel pretends to give us clearer notions of these matters, we ought to hear it, and laying aside all passion and prejudice, follow that which shall appear most conformable to right reason."

What a blessing is it to beings, with such limited capacities as ours confessedly are, to have God himself for our instructor in every

thing which it much concerns us to know! We are principally concerned in knowing; not the origin of arts, or the recondite depths of science; not the histories of mighty empires desolating the globe by their contentions; not the subtilties of logic, the mysteries of metaphysics, the sublimities of poetry, or the niceties of criticism. These, and subjects such as these, properly occupy the learned leisure of a few; but the bulk of human kind have ever been, and must ever remain, ignorant of them all; they must, of necessity, remain in the same state with that which a German emperor voluntarily put himself into, when he made a resolution, bordering on barbarism, that he would never read a printed book. We are all, of every rank and condition, equally concerned in knowing—what will become of us after death; and, if we are to live again, we are interested in knowing whether it be possible for us to do any thing whilst we live here, which may render that future life a happy one. Now, “that thing called Christianity,” as you scoffingly speak; that last best gift of Almighty God, as I esteem it, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, has given us the most clear and satisfactory information on both these points. It tells us, what deism never could have told us, that we shall certainly be raised from the dead; that, whatever be the nature of the soul, we shall certainly live for ever; and that, whilst we live here, it is possible for us to do much towards the rendering that everlasting life a happy one. These are tremendous truths to bad men; they cannot be received and reflected on with indifference by the best; and they suggest to all such a cogent motive to virtuous action, as deism could not furnish even to Brutus himself.

Some men have been warped to infidelity by viciousness of life; and some may have hypocritically professed Christianity from prospects of temporal advantage: but, being a stranger to your character, I neither impute the former to you, nor can admit the latter as operating on myself. The generality of unbelievers are such, from want of information on the subject of religion; having been engaged from their youth in struggling for worldly distinction, or perplexed with the incessant intricacies of business, or bewildered in the pursuits of pleasure, they have neither ability, inclination, nor leisure, to enter into critical disquisitions concerning the truth of Christianity. Men of this description are soon startled by objections which they are not competent to answer; and the loose morality of the age (so opposite to Christian perfection), co-operating with their want of Scriptural knowledge, they presently get rid of their nursery faith, and are seldom sedulous in the acquisition of another, founded, not on authority, but sober investigation. Presuming, however, that many deists are as sincere in their belief as I am in mine, and knowing that some are more able, and all as much interested as myself, to make a rational inquiry into the truth of revealed religion, I feel no propensity to judge uncharitably of any of them. They do not think as I do, on a subject surpassing all others in importance; but they are not, on that account, to be spoken of by me with asperity of language, to be thought of by me as persons alien-

ated from the mercies of God. The Gospel has been offered to their acceptance; and, from whatever cause they reject it, I cannot but esteem their situation to be dangerous. Under the influence of that persuasion I have been induced to write this book. I do not expect to derive from it either fame or profit; these are not improper incentives to honorable activity; but there is a time of life when they cease to direct the judgment of thinking men. What I have written will not, I fear, make any impression on you; but I indulge a hope, that it may not be without its effect on some of your readers. Infidelity is a rank weed; it threatens to overspread the land; its root is principally fixed amongst the great and opulent, but you are endeavoring to extend the malignity of its poison through all the classes of the community. There is a class of men, for whom I have the greatest respect, and whom I am anxious to preserve from the contamination of your irreligion; the merchants, manufacturers, and tradesmen of the kingdom. I consider the influence of the example of this class as essential to the welfare of the community. I know that they are in general given to reading, and desirous of information on all subjects. If this little book should chance to fall into their hands after they have read yours, and they should think that any of your objections to the authority of the Bible have not been fully answered, I entreat them to attribute the omission to the brevity which I have studied; to my desire of avoiding learned disquisitions; to my inadvertency; to my inability; to any thing rather than to an impossibility of completely obviating every difficulty you have brought forward. I address the same request to such of the youth of both sexes as may unhappily have imbibed, from your writings, the poison of infidelity; beseeching them to believe, that all their religious doubts may be removed, though it may not have been in my power to answer, to their satisfaction, all your objections. I pray God that the rising generation of this land may be preserved from that "evil heart of unbelief," which has brought ruin on a neighboring nation; that neither a neglected education, nor domestic irreligion, nor evil communication, nor the fashion of a licentious world, may ever induce them to forget, that religion alone ought to be their rule of life.

In the conclusion of my *Apology for Christianity*, I informed Mr. Gibbon of my extreme aversion to public controversy. I am now twenty years older than I was then, and I perceive that this my aversion has increased with my age. I have, through life, abandoned my little literary productions to their fate; such of them as have been attacked, have never received any defence from me; nor will this receive any, if it should meet with your public notice, or with that of any other man.

Sincerely wishing that you may become a partaker of that faith in revealed religion, which is the foundation of my happiness in this world, and of all my hopes in another, I bid you farewell.

R. LANDAFF.

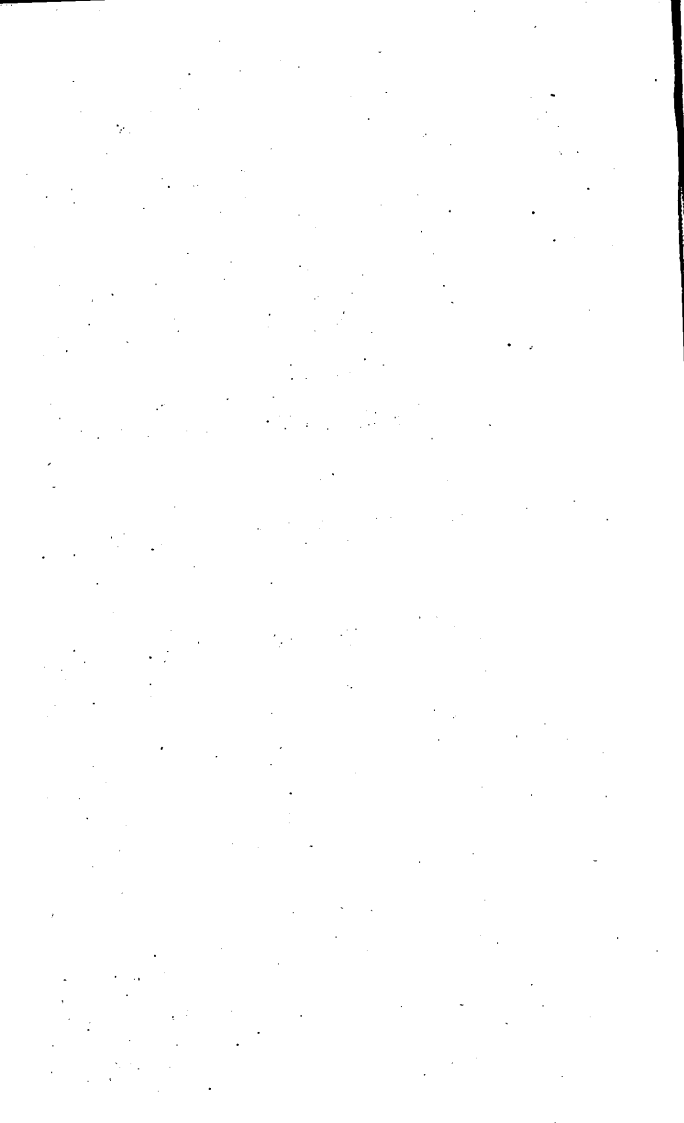
**A VIEW**  
**OF THE**  
**INTERNAL EVIDENCE**  
**OF**  
**THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.**  
**BY**  
**SOAME JENYNS, ESQ.**

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**“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”—Acts xxvi. 28.**

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## VIEW OF THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE

OF THE

## CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Most of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the divine origin of the Christian religion, have had recourse to arguments drawn from these three heads: The prophecies still extant in the Old Testament, the miracles recorded in the New, or the internal evidence arising from that excellence, and those clear marks of supernatural interposition, which are so conspicuous in the religion itself. The two former have been sufficiently explained and enforced by the ablest pens; but the last, which seems to carry with it the greatest degree of conviction, has never, I think, been considered with that attention which it deserves.

I mean not here to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies, or miracles; they both have or ought to have their proper weight; prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify; such are those to be found in various parts of the Scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe, that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application, or can entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament to have been performed by Christ and his apostles, were certainly convincing proofs of their divine commission to those who saw them; and as they were seen by such numbers, and are as well attested as other his-

torical facts, and, above all, as they were wrought on so great and so wonderful an occasion, they must still be admitted as evidence of no inconsiderable force; but, I think, they must now depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that religion, whose credibility they were first intended to support. To prove, therefore, the truth of the Christian religion, we should begin by showing the internal marks of divinity, which are stamped upon it; because on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great measure depends: for if we have once reason to be convinced, that this religion is derived from a supernatural origin; prophecies and miracles will become so far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable, that a supernatural revelation should be foretold and enforced by supernatural means.

What pure Christianity is, divested of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not to say; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offspring of fraud or fiction. Such, on a superficial view, I know it must appear to every man of good sense, whose sense has been altogether employed on other subjects; but if any one will give himself the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he will plainly see, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the same stock, nor planted by the same hand.

To ascertain the true system and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controversies of above seventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbish which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it during all that time, would indeed be an arduous task, which I shall by no means undertake; but to show, that it cannot possibly be derived from human wisdom, or human imposture, is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I shall attempt that, and that alone, by stating, and then explaining, the following plain and undeniable propositions.

First, that there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.

Secondly, that from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely superior to, but unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, that from this book may likewise be collected a system of Ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Lastly, that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men; much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that, therefore, it must undoubtedly have been effected by the interposition of Divine power, that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

## PROPOSITION I.

VERY little need be said to establish my first proposition, which is singly this:—That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament: that is, there is a collection of writings, distinguished by that denomination, containing four historical accounts of the birth, life, actions, discourses, and death of an extraordinary person named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judea, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Also one other historical account of the travels, transactions, and orations of some mean and illiterate men, known by the title of his apostles, whom he commissioned to propagate his religion after his death; which he foretold them he must suffer in confirmation of its truth. To these are added several epistolary writings, addressed by these persons to their fellow-laborers in this work, or to the several churches or societies of Christians, which they had established in the several cities through which they had passed.

It would not be difficult to prove, that these books were written soon after those extraordinary events, which are the subjects of them; as we find them quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted succession of writers from those to the present times: nor would it be less easy to show, that the truth of all those events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reasonably questioned, than the truth of any other facts recorded in any history whatever; as there can be no more reason to doubt, that there existed such a person as Jesus Christ, speaking, acting, and suffering in such a manner as is there described, than that there were such men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his contemporaries; or to suspect, that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of those epistles, to which their names are affixed, than that Cicero and Pliny did not write those which are ascribed to them. It might also be made appear, that these books, having been wrote by various persons at different times, and in distant places, could not possibly have been the work of a single impostor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being all stamped with the same marks of a uniform originality in their very frame and composition.

But all these circumstances I shall pass over unobserved, as they do not fall in with the course of my argument, nor are necessary for the support of it. Whether these books were wrote by the authors whose names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminished, or any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of translators, or transcribers; whether in the historical parts the writers were instructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inspiration at all; whether in the religious and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a Divine influence, or from the instructions and conversation of their master; whether in their facts or sentiments there is always the most exact agreement, or whether in both they sometimes differ from each other; whether they are in

any case mistaken, or always infallible, or ever pretended to be so, I shall not here dispute; let the deist avail himself of all these doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions: I shall not contend, because they affect not my argument. All that I assert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that such writings do now exist

## PROPOSITION II.

My second proposition is not quite so simple, but, I think, not less undeniable than the former, and is this:—That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object, and the doctrines; not only infinitely superior to, but totally unlike, every thing which had ever before entered into the mind of man. I say extracted, because all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occasions, and here only historically recorded, no uniform or regular system of theology is here to be found; and better, perhaps, it had been, if less labor had been employed by the learned, to bend and twist these divine materials into the polished forms of human systems, to which they never will submit, and for which they were never intended by their great Author. Why he chose not to leave any such behind him we know not, but it might possibly be, because he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving such a system, and that we are more properly, and more safely conducted by the distant and scattered rays, than by the too powerful sunshine of divine illumination. “If I have told you earthly things,” says he, “and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” (John iii. 12) that is, if my instructions, concerning your behavior in the present as relative to a future life, are so difficult to be understood, that you can scarcely believe me, how shall you believe, if I endeavored to explain to you the nature of celestial beings, the designs of Providence, and the mysteries of his dispensations; subjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to express?

First, then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this, to prepare us by a state of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is everywhere professed by Christ and his apostles to be the chief end of the Christian's life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harvest which is to pay him for all his labors. Yet, previous to their preaching, no such prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means prescribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that some of the philosophers, of antiquity entertained notions of a future state, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty. Their legislators also endeavored to infuse into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and punishments after death; but by this they only intended to give a sanction to their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of mankind in the present life. This alone seems to have been their end,

and a meritorious end it was; but Christianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler design in view, which is by a proper education here to render us fit members of a celestial society hereafter. In all former religions the good of the present life was the first object; in the Christian it is but the second; in those, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward; in this, the practice of virtue is enjoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in these two plans, that is in adhering to virtue from its present utility in expectation of future happiness, and living in such a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happiness; and the conduct and dispositions of those, who act on these different principles, must be no less different. On the first, the constant practice of justice, temperance, and sobriety, will be sufficient; but on the latter, we must add to these an habitual piety, faith, resignation, and contempt of the world. The first may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Christian. Hence it is that Christianity insists more strongly, than any preceding institution, religious or moral, on purity of heart, and a benevolent disposition; because these are absolutely necessary to its great end; but in those, whose recommendations of virtue regard the present life only, and whose promised rewards in another were low and sensual, no preparatory qualifications were requisite to enable men to practise the one, or to enjoy the other. And, therefore, we see this object is peculiar to this religion; and with it was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded, were new, and perhaps undiscoverable by reason, yet, when discovered, they are so consonant to it, that we cannot but readily assent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the present life is a state of probation and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we see around us; it is the only key which can open to us the designs of Providence in the economy of human affairs, the only clue which can guide us through that pathless wilderness, and the only plan on which this world could possibly have been formed, or on which the history of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happiness; because it is everywhere overspread with innumerable miseries; nor of misery, because it is interspersed with many enjoyments. It could not have been constituted for a scene of wisdom and virtue, because the history of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedness; nor of vice, because that is no plan at all, being destructive of all existence, and consequently of its own. But on this system all that we here meet with may be easily accounted for; for this mixture of happiness and misery, of virtue and vice, necessarily results from a state of probation and education; as probation implies trials, sufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chastisement for those offences.

In the next place the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God, and of man, of the pres-

ent, and of a future life, and of the relations which all these bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite dissimilar from any which had ever been thought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew so just a portrait of the worthlessness of this world, and all its pursuits, nor exhibited such distinct, lively, and exquisite pictures of the joys of another; of the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, "when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality." (1 Cor. xv. 53.) No other has ever represented the Supreme Being in the character of three persons united in one God.\* No other has attempted to reconcile those seeming contradictory but both true propositions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the free will of the creature with the over-ruling grace of the Creator. No other has so fully declared the necessity of wickedness and punishment, yet so effectually instructed individuals to resist the one, and to escape the other: no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it: no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of sin without the influence of a mediatorial interposition, and a vicarious atonement from the sufferings of a superior Being.† Whether these wonderful doctrines are worthy of our belief must depend on the opinion, which we entertain of the authority of those, who published them to the world; but certain it is, that they are all so far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it seems equally impossible, that they should ever have been derived from the knowledge, or the artifice of man.

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the established signification of words (which they call explaining), have ventured to expunge all these doctrines out of the Scriptures, for no other reason than that they are not able to comprehend them; and argue thus: The Scriptures are the word of God; in his word no propositions contradictory to reason can have a place; these propositions are contradictory to reason, and therefore they are not there: but if these bold assertors would claim any regard, they should reverse their argument and say, these doctrines make a part, and a material part of the Scriptures, they are contradictory to reason; no propo-

\* That there subsists some such union in the Divine nature, the whole tenor of the New Testament seems to express, and it was so understood in the earliest ages; but whether this union does or does not imply equality, or whether it subsists in general, or only in particular circumstances, we are not informed, and therefore on these questions it is not only unnecessary, but improper for us to decide.

† That Christ suffered and died, as an atonement for the sins of mankind, is a doctrine so constantly and so strongly enforced through every part of the New Testament, that whoever will seriously peruse those writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reason and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, assert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the histories of Greece and Rome.

tions contradictory to reason can be a part of the word of God, and therefore neither the Scriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him: this would be an argument worthy of rational and candid deists, and demand a respectful attention; but when men pretend to disprove facts by reasoning, they have no right to expect an answer.

And here I cannot omit observing, that the personal character of the author of this religion is no less new, and extraordinary, than the religion itself, "who spake as never man spake" (John vii. 46), and lived as never man lived: in proof of this, I do not mean to allege, that he was born of a virgin, that he fasted forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and after being buried three days, that he arose from the dead; because these accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to the relation of these facts; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be disputed; for instance, he is the only founder of a religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally unconducive to any worldly purpose whatever: all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moses himself, blended their religious institutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their respective people; but Christ neither aimed at, nor would accept of any such power: he rejected every object, which all other men pursue, and made choice of all those which others fly from, and are afraid of: he refused power, riches, honors, and pleasure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endeavored to impose on the world pretended revelations, and some of them from pride, obstinacy, or principle, have gone so far as to lay down their lives rather than retract; but I defy history to show one, who ever made his own sufferings and death a necessary part of his original plan, and essential to his mission; this Christ actually did; he foresaw, foretold, declared their necessity, and voluntarily endured them. If we seriously contemplate the divine lessons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful discourses, and the consistent conduct of this wonderful person, we cannot possibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman; and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be considered in no other light; and even under this character he would deserve some attention, because of so sublime and rational an insanity there is no other instance in the history of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the superior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruse with attention those unparalleled writings in which it is transmitted to the present times, and compare them with the most celebrated productions of the pagan world; and if he is not sensible of their superior beauty, simplicity, and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taste as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Christian: for in what school of ancient philosophy can he find a lesson of morality so perfect as Christ's sermon on the mount? From which



of them can he collect an address to the Deity so concise, and yet so comprehensive, so expressive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that short prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to his disciples? From the works of what sage of antiquity can he produce so pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the distressed, and enforced by such assurances of a reward, as in those words of Christ? "Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick and in prison, and came unto thee? Then shall I answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. xxv. 34.) Where is there so just, and so elegant a reproof of eagerness and anxiety in worldly pursuits, closed with so forcible an exhortation to confidence in the goodness of our Creator, as in these words? "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these: wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you? O ye of little faith!" (Matt. vi. 26. 28.) By which of their most celebrated poets are the joys reserved for the righteous in a future state so sublimely described, as by this short declaration, that they are superior to all description? "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. ii. 9.) Where, amidst the dark clouds of pagan philosophy, can he show us such a clear prospect of a future state, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the general judgment, as in St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians? Or from whence can he produce such cogent exhortations to the practice of every virtue, such ardent incitements to piety and devotion, and such assistances to attain them, as those which are to be met with throughout every page of these inimitable writings? To quote all the passages in them, relative to these subjects, would be almost to transcribe the whole; it is sufficient to observe, that they are everywhere stamped with such apparent marks of supernatural assistance, as render them indisputably superior to, and totally unlike all human compositions whatever; and this superiority and dissimilarity is still more strongly marked by one remarkable circumstance peculiar to themselves, which is, that whilst the moral parts, being of the most general use, are intelligible to the meanest capacities, the learned and inquisi-

tive, throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhaustible discoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of Providence.

To say the truth, before the appearance of Christianity there existed nothing like religion on the face of the earth ; the Jewish only excepted : all other nations were immersed in the grossest idolatry, which had little or no connexion with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their own imaginary deities : they all worshipped a multiplicity of gods and demons, whose favor they courted by impious, obscene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whose anger they endeavored to appease by the most abominable cruelties. In the politest ages of the politest nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, history, architecture, and sculpture to the highest perfection, and made no inconsiderable advances in those of mathematics, natural, and even moral philosophy, in religious knowledge they had made none at all ; a strong presumption, that the noblest efforts of the mind of man unassisted by revelation were unequal to the task. Some few indeed of their philosophers were wise enough to reject these general absurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight : Plato introduced many sublime ideas of nature, and its first cause, and of the immortality of the soul, which being above his own and all human discovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moses or the conversation of some Jewish rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he resided, and studied for several years : from him Aristotle, and from both Cicero and some few others drew most amazing stores of philosophical science, and carried their researches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But these were bright constellations, which appeared singly in several centuries, and even these with all this knowledge were very deficient in true theology. From the visible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator ; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little understood ; of piety and devotion they had scarce any sense, nor could they form any mode of worship worthy of the purity and perfection of the Divine nature : they occasionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty and excellence of virtue : but they founded it not on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happiness of heaven as its reward, or its object. They sometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongst the gods ; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms : for with them heaven was open only to legislators and conquerors, the civilizers or destroyers of mankind. This was, then, the summit of religion in the most polished nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philosophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and less understood by the generality of mankind in their own countries ; whilst all the rest were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and superstition.

At this time Christianity broke forth from the east like a rising

sun, and dispelled this universal darkness, which obscured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all those remoter regions, to which its salutary influence has not as yet extended. From all those which it has reached, it has, notwithstanding its corruptions, banished all those enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals: it has taught men the unity and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead, life everlasting, and the kingdom of heaven: doctrines as inconceivable to the wisest of mankind antecedent to its appearance, as the Newtonian system is at this day to the most ignorant tribes of savages in the wilds of America; doctrines, which human reason never could have discovered, but which, when discovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peasant and mechanic with the Bible in his hand. These are all plain facts, too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of these books, the relations which they contain, or the inspiration of their authors, of these facts no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; because there are the books, and in them is this religion.

### PROPOSITION III.

My third proposition is this; that from this book, called the New Testament, may be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection than in any other of the ancient philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reason, I mean all those, which enforce the practice of such duties as reason informs us must improve our nature, and conduce to the happiness of mankind: such are piety to God, benevolence to men, justice, charity, temperance, and sobriety, with all, those, which prohibit the commission of the contrary vices, all which debase our natures, and, by mutual injuries, introduce universal disorder, and consequently universal misery. By precepts founded on false principles, I mean those, which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of these salutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; such are valor, patriotism, and friendship.

That virtues of the first kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Christian religion than by any other, it is here unnecessary to prove, because this is a truth which has been frequently demonstrated by her friends, and never once denied by the most determined of her adversaries; but it will be proper to show, that those of the latter sort are most judiciously omitted; be-

cause they have really no intrinsic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and spirit of this institution.

Valor, for instance, or active courage, is for the most part constitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, strength, or any other endowment of the mind or body; and so far is it from producing any salutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happiness into society, that it is the usual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries distract the world with bloodshed and devastation. It is the engine by which the strong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppress the innocent; it is the chief instrument which ambition employs in her unjust pursuits of wealth and power, and is therefore so much extolled by her votaries: it was indeed congenial with the religion of pagans, whose gods were, for the most part, made out of deceased heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the mischiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth, and therefore with them this was the first of virtues, and had even engrossed that denomination to itself; but whatever merit it may have assumed among pagans, with Christians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occasions in which they are permitted to exert it: they are so far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to resist it; they are so far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their first duties is to forgive them; so far from being incited to destroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to serve them to the utmost of their power. If Christian nations therefore were nations of Christians, all war would be impossible and unknown amongst them, and valor could be neither of use or estimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Christian virtues, being irreconcilable with all its precepts. I object not to the praise and honors bestowed on the valiant: they are the least tribute which can be paid them by those who enjoy safety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and sufferings; I assert only, that active courage can never be a Christian virtue, because a Christian can have nothing to do with it. Passive courage is indeed frequently and properly inculcated by this meek and suffering religion, under the titles of patience and resignation: a real and substantial virtue this, and a direct contrast to the former; for passive courage arises from the noblest dispositions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty: active from the meanest; from passion, vanity, and self-dependence: passive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perseverance in duty; active is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injustice: in short, passive courage is the resolution of a philosopher, active the ferocity of a savage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven; for valor is not that sort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken; nor are the turbulent spirits

of heroes and conquerors admissible into those regions of peace, subordination, and tranquillity.

Patriotism also, that celebrated virtue, so much practised in ancient, and so much professed in modern times, that virtue which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world: this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded; because it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts, the extensive benevolence of this religion. A Christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world; and his neighbors and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distresses demand his friendly assistance: Christianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own: Christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessings on every nation upon earth; patriotism to copy the mean partiality of an English parish officer, who thinks injustice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the interests of his own inconsiderable village. This has ever been a favorite virtue with mankind, because it conceals self-interest under the mask of public spirit, not only from others, but even from themselves, and gives a license to inflict wrongs and injuries, not only with impunity, but with applause; but it is so diametrically opposite to the great characteristic of this institution, that it never could have been admitted into the list of Christian virtues.

Friendship, likewise, although more congenial to the principles of Christianity, arising from more tender and amiable dispositions, could never gain admittance amongst her benevolent precepts, for the same reason; because it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a single object, which is here commanded to be extended over all: where friendships arise from similarity of sentiments, and disinterested affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretensions to merit; for it is justly observed, "If ye love them, which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them." (Luke vi. 32.) But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and interests, or from a participation of vices, the usual parents of what are called friendships among mankind, they are then both mischievous and criminal, and consequently forbidden; but in their utmost purity deserve no recommendation from this religion.

To the judicious omission of these false virtues we may add that remarkable silence, which the Christian Legislator everywhere preserves on subjects esteemed by all others of the highest importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace; of these he has not taken the least notice, probably for this plain reason, because it would have been impossible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which must not have been inconsistent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical observance of such imperfect creatures as men ruling over, and contending with each other. For instance, had he absolutely forbid all resistance to the reigning powers, he had constituted a plan of des-

potism, and made men slaves; had he allowed it, he must have authorized disobedience, and made them rebels; had he, in direct terms, prohibited all war, he must have left his followers for ever an easy prey to every infidel invader; had he permitted it, he must have licensed all that rapine and murder with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are those new precepts in this religion peculiarly corresponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven. Of these the chief are poorness of spirit, forgiveness of injuries, and charity to all men; to these we may add repentance, faith, self-abasement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and absolutely necessary to the attainment of its end.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 3.) By which poorness of spirit is to be understood a disposition of mind, meek, humble, submissive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all resentment. This was so new, and so opposite to the ideas of all Pagan moralists, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanness, which must induce men to sacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honor, to a shameful pusillanimity; and such it appears to almost all who are called Christians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but disavow it in principle, notwithstanding this explicit declaration of their Master. We see them revenging the smallest affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honor; and, in their national capacities, destroying each other with fire and sword, for the low considerations of commercial interests, the balance of rival powers, or the ambition of princes. We see them with their last breath animating each other to a savage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents; and, what is still worse, we hear all these barbarisms celebrated by historians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in senates, and even sanctified in pulpits. But universal practice cannot alter the nature of things, nor universal error change the nature of truth. Pride was not made for men, but humility, meekness, and resignation, that is, poorness of spirit, was made for man, and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious situation; and is the only disposition of mind, which can enable him to enjoy ease and quiet here, and happiness hereafter. Yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven: Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." (Mark x. 14.)

Another precept, equally new and no less excellent, is forgiveness of injuries: "Ye have heard," says Christ to his disciples, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you,

and persecute you." (Matt. v. 43.) This was a lesson so new, and so utterly unknown, till taught by his doctrines, and enforced by his example, that the wisest moralists of the wisest nations and ages represented the desire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind, and the accomplishment of it as one of the chief felicities attendant on a fortunate man. But how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind, is forgiveness! it is more magnanimous, because every generous and exalted disposition of the human mind is requisite to the practice of it; for these alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and insults of wickedness and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation; these alone can teach us, that such are but a part of those sufferings allotted to us in this state of probation, and to know, that to overcome evil with good is the most glorious of all victories: it is the most beneficial, because this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal succession of injuries and retaliations; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for satisfaction. But would we observe this salutary precept, to love our enemies, and to do good to those who despitefully use us, this obstinate benevolence would at last conquer the most inveterate hearts, and we should have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a Christian martyr, suffering with resignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero, breathing revenge, and destroying the innocent? yet noble and useful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractised, but decried in principle, as mean and ignominious, though so obvious a remedy for most of the miseries of this life, and so necessary a qualification for the happiness of another.

A third precept, first noticed and first enjoined by this institution, is charity to all men. What this is, we may best learn from this admirable description, painted in the following words; "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth; feareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things." (1 Cor. xiii. 4.) Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright constellation of all virtues, which consists not, as many imagine, in the building of monasteries, endowment of hospitals, or the distribution of alms, but in such an amiable disposition of mind as exercises itself every hour in acts of kindness, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happiness in the present life, or render us capable of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and so it is declared to be by the author of it; "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another; by this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John xiii. 34.) This benevolent disposition is made the great characteristic of a Christian, the test of his obedience, and the mark by

which he is to be distinguished. This love for each other is that charity just now described, and contains all those qualities, which are there attributed to it; humility, patience, meekness, and beneficence: without which we must live in perpetual discord, and consequently cannot pay obedience to this commandment by loving one another; a commandment so sublime, so rational, and so beneficial, so wisely calculated to correct the depravity, diminish the wickedness, and abate the miseries of human nature, that, did we universally comply with it, we should soon be relieved from all the inquietudes arising from our own unruly passions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all those injuries, to which we are perpetually exposed from the indulgence of the same passions in others. It would also preserve our minds in such a state of tranquillity, and so prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we should slide out of a life of peace, love, and benevolence, into that celestial society, by an almost imperceptible transition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who so entitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, because the most indispensably necessary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven; into which, if proud, turbulent, and vindictive spirits were permitted to enter, they must unavoidably destroy the happiness of that state, by the operations of the same passions and vices by which they disturb the present; and therefore all such must be eternally excluded, not only as a punishment, but also from incapacity.

Repentance, by this we plainly see, is another new moral duty strenuously insisted on by this religion, and by no other, because absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of its end; for this alone can purge us from those transgressions, from which we cannot be totally exempted in this state of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence also we may learn, that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but such as entirely changes the nature and disposition of the offender; which in the language of Scripture is called "being born again." Mere contrition for past crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unless it operates to this entire conversion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named: for sorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can restore health to a body distempered by a long course of vice and intemperance. Hence also every one, who is in the least acquainted with himself, may judge of the reasonableness of the hope that is in him, and of his situation in a future state, by that of his present. If he feels in himself a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleasures or business of the world, he may be assured, that he must be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only because his conduct can merit no such reward, but because, if admitted, he would find there no objects satisfactory to his passions, inclinations, and pursuits, and therefore could



only disturb the happiness of others without enjoying any share of it himself.

Faith is another moral duty enjoined by this institution, of a species so new, that the philosophers of antiquity had no word expressive of this idea, nor any such idea to be expressed; for the word *πίστις* or *fides*, which we translate faith, was never used by any Pagan writer, in a sense the least similar to that, to which it is applied in the New Testament: where in general it signifies an humble, teachable, and candid disposition, a trust in God, and confidence in his promises; when applied particularly to Christianity, it means no more than a belief of this single proposition, that Christ was the Son of God; that is, in the language of those writings, the Messiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was sent by God into the world to preach righteousness, judgment, and everlasting life, and to die as an atonement for the sins of mankind. This was all that Christ required to be believed by those who were willing to become his disciples; he, who does not believe this, is not a Christian, and he who does, believes the whole that is essential to his profession, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been so tortured and so misapplied to mean every absurdity, which artifice could impose upon ignorance, that it has lost all pretensions to the title of virtue; but if brought back to the simplicity of its original signification, it well deserves that name, because it usually arises from the most amiable dispositions, and is always a direct contrast to pride, obstinacy, and self-conceit. If taken in the extensive sense of an assent to the evidence of things not seen, it comprehends the existence of a God, and a future state, and is therefore not only itself a moral virtue, but the source from whence all others must proceed; for on the belief of these all religion and morality must entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of moral merit (as some will represent it), because it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience shows us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and disbelieve almost any propositions, which best suit their interests or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their sincere opinions with their situations and circumstances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to shut it against the strongest rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of scepticism and infidelity when we "love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil." (John iii. 19.) And this, I think, sufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the supposition of its being quite involuntary, and necessarily dependent on the degree of evidence, which is offered to our understandings.

Self-abasement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favor of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unless assisted by his overruling influence. This doctrine seems at first sight to infringe on

our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit; but, on a closer examination, the truth of it may be demonstrated both by reason and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other; and that it is productive of so much humility, resignation, and dependence on God, that it justly claims a place amongst the most illustrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and self-sufficient principles of the ancient philosophers as well as modern deists, and therefore before the publication of the Gospel totally unknown and uncomprehended.

Detachment from the world is another moral virtue constituted by this religion alone; so new, that even at this day few of its professors can be persuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world is not to be understood a seclusion from society, abstraction from all business, or retirement to a gloomy cloister. Industry and labor, cheerfulness and hospitality are frequently recommended; nor is the acquisition of wealth and honors prohibited, if they can be obtained by honest means, and a moderate degree of attention and care; but such an unremitted anxiety and perpetual application, as engrosses our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, because they are incompatible with the spirit of this religion, and must utterly disqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain pursuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our harness, and then expect, if no gigantic crime stands in the way, to step immediately into the kingdom of heaven; but this is impossible! for without a previous detachment from the business of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happiness of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of Pagans, because their virtues were altogether connected with this business, and consisted chiefly in conducting it with honor to themselves, and benefit to the public. But Christianity has a nobler object in view, which, if not attended to, must be lost for ever. This object is that celestial mansion of which we should never lose sight, and to which we should be ever advancing during our journey through life; but this by no means precludes us from performing the business, or enjoying the amusements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great author of the Christian institution first and singly ventured to oppose all the chief principles of Pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly opposite to those erroneous, though long-established, opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The most celebrated virtues of the ancients were high spirit, intrepid courage, and implacable resentment.

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer*, was the portrait of the most illustrious hero, drawn by one of the first poets of antiquity. To all these admired qualities, those of a true Christian are an exact contrast; for this religion constantly enjoins poorness of spirit, meekness, patience, and forgiveness of injuries. "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. v. 39.) The favorite characters among the Pagans were, the turbulent, ambitious, and in-

trepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and spent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both these are equally adverse to the Christian system, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to secure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth," &c. "Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek." (Matt. vi. 31.) The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame: for this, their poets sang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philosophers and legislators as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what says the Christian legislator to his disciples on this subject? "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for my sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. v. 11.) So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Christian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the most celebrated virtues of the former are more opposite to the spirit, and more inconsistent with the end of the latter, than even their most infamous vices; and that a Brutus, wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppressor of his country, or a Cato, murdering himself from an impatience of control, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmissible into the kingdom of heaven, than even a Messalina, or a Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has so much contributed to corrupt the true spirit of the Christian institution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earliest education for the manners of Pagan antiquity: from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it; to applaud false virtues, which that disavows; to be guided by laws of honor, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that detests; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and suicides with admiration, whose conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of these opposite principles was generated that monstrous system of cruelty and benevolence, of barbarism and civility, of rapine and justice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generosity, which harassed the world for several centuries with crusades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and single combats, and even still retains influence enough, under the name of honor, to defeat the most beneficent ends of this holy institution. I mean not by this to pass any censure on the principles of valor, patriotism, or honor: they may be useful, and perhaps necessary, in the commerce and business of the present turbulent and imperfect state; and those who are actuated by them may be virtuous, honest, and even religious men: all that I assert is, that they cannot be Christians. A profligate may be a Christian, though a bad one, because he may be overpowered by passions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whose ruling principle is honor, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Christian, because he

erects a standard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically opposite to the whole tenor of that religion.

The contrast between the Christian, and all other institutions religious or moral previous to its appearance, is sufficiently evident, and surely the superiority of the former is as little to be disputed; unless any one shall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgiveness, and benevolence are less amiable, and less beneficial qualities than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity: that the contempt of riches is less noble than their acquisition by fraud and villany, or the distribution of them to the poor less commendable than avarice or profusion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object less exalted, less rational, and less worthy of pursuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applause of men: that worthless tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedness of the other; a tribute, which a wise man ought always to despise, because a good man can scarce ever obtain.

### CONCLUSION.

If I mistake not, I have now fully established the truth of my three propositions:—

First, That there is now extant a book entitled the New Testament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a system of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only superior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewise be collected a system of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reason is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wisest philosophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on false principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly corresponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of these propositions, I am persuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this short but certain conclusion must inevitably follow; that such a system of religion and morality could not possibly have been the work of any man, or set of men, much less of those obscure, ignorant, and illiterate persons, who actually did discover, and publish it to the world; and that therefore it must have been effected by the supernatural interposition of divine power and wisdom; that is, that it must derive its origin from God.

This argument seems to me little short of demonstration, and is indeed founded on the very same reasoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his invisible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too small for perception, and the immense planetary orbs too vast for imagination. We are certain that these cannot be the works of man; and therefore we conclude with reason, that they must be

the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the same manner we see here a scheme of religion and morality unlike and superior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impossible to have been discovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man; and therefore by the very same mode of reasoning, and with the same justice, we conclude, that it must derive its origin from the same omnipotent and omniscient Being.

Nor was the propagation of this religion less extraordinary than the religion itself, or less above the reach of all human power, than the discovery of it was above that of all human understanding. It is well known, that in the course of a very few years it was spread over all the principal parts of Asia and of Europe, and this by the ministry only of an inconsiderable number of the most inconsiderable persons; that at this time Paganism was in the highest repute, believed universally by the vulgar, and patronized by the great; that the wisest men of the wisest nations assisted at its sacrifices, and consulted its oracles on the most important occasions. Whether these were the tricks of the priests or of the devil, is of no consequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome; the fact is certain, that, on the preaching of a few fishermen, their altars were deserted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever we may think of the rest: and this is surely sufficient to prove the authority of their commission; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could possibly be their own.

How much this divine institution has been corrupted, or how soon these corruptions began, how far it has been discolored by the false notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or how early these notions and fictions were introduced, no learning or sagacity is now able precisely to ascertain; but surely no man, who seriously considers the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at first propagated through the world, the persons who achieved that wonderful work, and the originality of those writings in which it is still recorded, can possibly believe, that it could ever have been the production of imposture, or chance; or that from an imposture the most wicked and blasphemous (for if an imposture, such it is) all the religion and virtue now existing on earth can derive their source.

But, notwithstanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe, that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian lustre, were insufficient for the task, the son of a carpenter, together with twelve of the meanest and most illiterate mechanics his associates, unassisted by any supernatural power, should be able to discover or invent a system of theology the most sublime, and of ethics the most perfect, which had escaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero; and that from this system, by their own sagacity, they had excluded every false virtue, though universally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though despised and ridiculed by all the rest of the world;—if any one can believe that these men could become impostors, for no other

purpose than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honor or advantage; or that, if all this should have been possible, these few inconsiderable persons should have been able, in the course of a few years, to have spread this their religion over most parts of the then known world, in opposition to the interests, pleasures, ambition, prejudices, and even reason of mankind; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of states, the force of custom, the blindness of zeal, the influence of priests, the arguments of orators, and the philosophy of the world, without any supernatural assistance;—if any one can believe all these miraculous events, contradictory to the constant experience of the powers and dispositions of human nature, he must be possessed of much more faith than is necessary to make him a Christian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

But should these credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable; from believing it what harm could ensue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or subjects more ungovernable? the rich more insolent, or the poor more disorderly? Would it make worse parents or children, husbands or wives, masters or servants, friends or neighbors? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and consequently more happy in every situation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, because it cannot be a crime to assent to such evidence, as has been able to convince the best and wisest of mankind; by which, if false, Providence must have permitted men to deceive each other, for the most beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be surely more meritorious to believe, from a disposition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with scorn from obstinacy and self-conceit. It cannot be detrimental, because, if Christianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a steady and uniform course of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can support them in the hour of distress, of sickness, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deism on the minds of Pagan philosophers, that can now avail us nothing; for that light, which once lightened the Gentiles, is now absorbed in the brighter illumination of the Gospel; we can now form no rational system of deism, but what must be borrowed from that source, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, must be exactly the same; and therefore, if we will not accept of Christianity, we will have no religion at all. Accordingly we see, that those who fly from this, scarce ever stop at deism; but hasten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonstrated the divine origin of the Christian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted; no others, however plausible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever disprove it, because, if it is once shown to be true, it cannot be false. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered some candid and ingenuous minds, I shall here bestow

a few lines on those which have the most weight, in order to wipe out, or at least to diminish their perplexing influence.

But here I must previously observe, that the most unsurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we oftener disbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence. The first step towards thinking this revelation true, is our hope that it is so; for whenever we much wish any proposition to be true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the interest of all good men, that its authority should be well founded; and still more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better; because it is the only system, either of reason or religion, which can give them any assurance of pardon. The punishment of vice is a debt due to justice, which cannot be remitted without compensation: repentance can be no compensation; it may change a wicked man's disposition, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is past. If any one, by profligacy and extravagance, contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiser, and hinder him from running into further distresses, but can never pay off his old bonds; for which he must be ever accountable, unless they are discharged by himself, or some other in his stead; this very discharge Christianity alone holds forth on our repentance, and, if true, will certainly perform: the truth of it therefore must ardently be wished for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent nor reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Christianity, if he can; because he will find it the surest preservative against all vicious habits and their attendant evils, the best resource under distresses and disappointments, ill health and ill fortune, and the firmest basis on which contemplation can rest; and without some, the human mind is never perfectly at ease. But if any one is attached to a favorite pleasure, or eagerly engaged in worldly pursuits incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he must either relinquish those pursuits with uneasiness, or persist in them with remorse and dissatisfaction, and therefore must commence unbeliever in his own defence. With such I shall not dispute, nor pretend to persuade men by arguments to make themselves miserable: but to those, who, not afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by such objections, I will offer the following answers, which, though short, will, I doubt not, be sufficient to show them their weakness and futility.

In the first place, then, some have been so bold as to strike at the root of all revelation from God, by asserting, that it is incredible, because unnecessary, and unnecessary, because the reason which he has bestowed on mankind is sufficiently able to discover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly, at various times from the remotest ages, received so much knowledge by divine communications, and have ever been so much inclined to impute it all to their

own sufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reason unassisted can effect. But to form a true judgment on this subject, let us turn our eyes to those remote regions of the globe, to which this supernatural assistance has never yet extended, and we shall there see men, endued with sense and reason not inferior to our own, so far from being capable of forming systems of religion and morality, that they are at this day totally unable to make a nail or a hatchet; from whence we may surely be convinced, that reason alone is so far from being sufficient to offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it has never yet been able to lead them to any degree of culture or civilization whatever. These have uniformly flowed from that great fountain of divine communication opened in the East, in the earliest ages, and thence been gradually diffused in salubrious streams, throughout the various regions of the earth. Their rise and progress, by surveying the history of the world, may easily be traced backwards to their source; and wherever these have not as yet been able to penetrate, we there find the human species not only void of all true religious and moral sentiments, but not the least emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity; which seems a demonstration, that although human reason is capable of progression in science, yet the first foundations must be laid by supernatural instructions; for surely no other probable cause can be assigned why one part of mankind should have made such an amazing progress in religious, moral, metaphysical, and philosophical inquiries; such wonderful improvements in policy, legislation, commerce, and manufactures, while the other part, formed with the same natural capacities, and divided only by seas and mountains, should remain, during the same number of ages, in a state little superior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations; murdering each other to satiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appease their hunger. I say no cause can be assigned for this amazing difference, except that the first have received information from those divine communications recorded in the Scriptures, and the latter have never yet been favored with such assistance. This remarkable contrast seems an unanswerable, though, perhaps, a new proof of the necessity of revelation, and a solid refutation of all arguments against it, drawn from the sufficiency of human reason. And as reason in her natural state is thus incapable of making any progress in knowledge; so when furnished with materials by supernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, she falls into more numerous, and more gross errors, than her own native ignorance could ever have suggested. There is then no absurdity so extravagant, which she is not ready to adopt; she has persuaded some, that there is no God; others, that there can be no future state: she has taught some, that there is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his necessities are actions equally meritorious: she has convinced many, that they have no free-will, in opposition to their own experience; some, that there can be no such thing as soul, or spirit, contrary to their



own perceptions; and others, no such thing as matter, or body, in contradiction to their senses. By analyzing all things she can show, that there is nothing in any thing; by perpetual sifling she can reduce all existence to the invisible dust of scepticism; and, by recurring to first principles, prove, to the satisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far such a guide is to be depended on in the important concerns of religion and morals, I leave to the judgment of every considerate man to determine. This is certain, that human reason in its highest state of cultivation, amongst the philosophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion comparable to Christianity; nor have all those sources of moral virtue, such as truth, beauty, and the fitness of things, which modern philosophers have endeavored to substitute in its stead, ever been effectual to produce good men, and have themselves often been the productions of some of the worst.

Others there are, who allow, that a revelation from God may be both necessary, and credible; but allege, that the Scriptures, that is the books of the Old and New Testament, cannot be that revelation; because in them are to be found errors and inconsistencies, fabulous stories, false facts, and false philosophy: which can never be derived from the fountain of all wisdom and truth. To this I reply, that I readily acknowledge, that the Scriptures are not revelations from God, but the history of them: the revelation itself is derived from God; but the history of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the least affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own supernatural excellence. If in these books such a religion, as has been here described, actually exists, no seeming, or even real defects to be found in them can disprove the divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for instance, grant, that the Mosaic history of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles of those early ages, who imagined the earth to be a vast plain, and the celestial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it; will it from thence follow, that Moses could not be a proper instrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a divine law, because he was not inspired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian systems? or that Christ must be an impostor, because Moses was not an astronomer? Let us also suppose, that the accounts of Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the devils' taking refuge in the herd of swine, with several other narrations in the New Testament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but stories accommodated to the ignorance and superstitions of the times and countries in which they were written, or pious frauds, intended to impress on vulgar minds a higher reverence of the power and sanctity of Christ; will this in the least impeach the excellence of his religion, or the authority of its founder? or is Christianity answerable for all the fables of which it may have been the innocent occasion? The want of this obvious distinction has much injured the Christian cause; because on this ground it has ever been most successfully

attacked, and on this ground it is not easily to be defended: for if the records of this revelation are supposed to be the revelation itself, the least defect discovered in them must be fatal to the whole. What has led many to overlook this distinction is that common phrase, that the Scriptures are the word of God; and in one sense they certainly are; that is, they are the sacred repository of all the revelations, dispensations, promises, and precepts which God has vouchsafed to communicate to mankind; but by this expression we are not to understand, that every part of this voluminous collection of historical, poetical, prophetic, theological, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, was dictated by the immediate influence of divine inspiration: the authors of these books pretended to no such infallibility; and if they claim it not for themselves, who has authority to claim it for them? Christ required no such belief from those who were willing to be his disciples. He says, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life," (John vi. 47); but where does he say, He that believeth not every word contained in the Old Testament, which was then extant, or every word of the New Testament, which was to be wrote for the instruction of future generations, hath not everlasting life? There are innumerable occurrences related in the Scriptures, some of greater, some of less, and some of no importance at all; the truth of which we can have no reason to question, but the belief of them is surely not essential to the faith of a Christian: I have no doubt but that St. Paul was shipwrecked, and that he left his cloak and parchments at Troas; but the belief of these facts makes no part of Christianity, nor is the truth of them any proof of its authority. It proves only that this apostle could not in common life be under the perpetual influence of infallible inspiration; for, had he been so, he would not have put to sea before a storm, nor have forgot his cloak. These writers were undoubtedly directed by supernatural influence in all things necessary to the great work, which they were appointed to perform. At particular times, and on particular occasions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to speak languages, and to work miracles; but in all other circumstances, they seem to have been left to the direction of their own understandings like other men. In the sciences of history, geography, astronomy, and philosophy, they appear to have been no better instructed than others, and therefore were not less liable to be misled by the errors and prejudices of the times and countries in which they lived. They related facts like honest men, to the best of their knowledge or information, and they recorded the divine lessons of their master with the utmost fidelity; but they pretended to no infallibility, for they sometimes differed in their relations, and they sometimes disagreed in their sentiments. All which proves only, that they did not act, or write in a combination to deceive, but not in the least impeaches the truth of the revelation which they published; which depends not on any external evidence whatever. For I will venture to affirm, that if any one could prove, what is impossible to be proved, because it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, and philosophy, in every

page of the Bible; that the prophecies therein delivered are all but fortunate guesses, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded no better than legendary tales: if any one could show, that these books were never written by their pretended authors, but were posterior impositions on illiterate and credulous ages: all these wonderful discoveries would prove no more than this, that God, for reasons to us unknown, has thought proper to permit a revelation by him communicated to mankind to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their frauds from its earliest infancy, in the same manner in which he has visibly permitted it to be mixed and corrupted from that period to the present hour. If in these books a religion superior to all human imagination actually exists, it is of no consequence to the proof of its divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is still a diamond, nor can the dirt, which surrounds it, depreciate its value or destroy its lustre.

To some speculative and refined observers it has appeared incredible, that a wise and benevolent Creator should have constituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another; that is, that he should have revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal passions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole economy of that world which he has created, and in which he has thought proper to place them. This, say they, with regard to the Christian is apparently the case: the love of power, riches, honor, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this institution are all these depreciated and discouraged. Government is essential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and imposition; yet are all these strictly forbid. Nations cannot subsist without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, desolation, and murder; yet are these prohibited under the severest threats. The nonresistance of evil must subject individuals to continual oppressions, and leave nations a defenceless prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under insults and injuries must every day provoke new insults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, must put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and industry; yet is this required. In short, were these precepts universally obeyed, the disposition of all human affairs must be entirely changed, and the business of the world, constituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this I answer, that such indeed is the Christian revelation, though some of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and such it is constantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by those, who published it under his immediate direction: to these he says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John xv. 19.) To the Jews he declares, "Ye are of this world; I am not of this

world." (John viii. 23.) St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world," (Rom. xii. 2); and to the Corinthians, "We speak not the wisdom of this world." (Cor. ii. 6.) St. James says, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (Jam. iv. 4.) This irreconcilable disagreement between Christianity and the world is announced in numberless other places in the New Testament, and indeed by the whole tenor of those writings. These are plain declarations, which, in spite of all the evasions of those good managers, who choose to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, stand fixed and immovable against all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended necessity, and must ever forbid any reconciliation between the pursuits of this world and the Christian institution: but they, who reject it on this account, enter not into the sublime spirit of this religion, which is not a code of precise laws designed for the well ordering society, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a divine lesson of purity and perfection, so far superior to the low considerations of conquest, government, and commerce, that it takes no more notice of them than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the industry of ants: they recollect not what is the first and principal object of this institution; that is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the present life, for the sake of augmenting our happiness here, but to conduct us through a state of dangers and sufferings, of sin and temptation, in such a manner as to qualify us for the enjoyment of happiness hereafter. All other institutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteristic of this is to be against it; and therefore the merits of Christian doctrines are not to be weighed in the scales of public utility, like those of moral precepts, because worldly utility is not their end. If Christ and his apostles had pretended, that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and prosperity of nations, or of men, they would have deserved but little credit; but they constantly profess the contrary, and everywhere declare, that their religion is adverse to the world, and all its pursuits. Christ says, speaking of his disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." (John xvii. 16.) It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which their author professedly disclaims: nor can it surely be deemed a defect, that it is adverse to the vain pursuits of this world; for so are reason, wisdom, and experience; they all teach us the same lesson, they all demonstrate to us every day, that these are begun on false hopes, carried on with disquietude, and end in disappointment. This professed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous business of the world, is therefore so far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this alone, I think, would be abundantly sufficient. The great plan and benevolent design of this dispensation is plainly this; to enlighten the minds, purify the reli

gion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to select the most meritorious of them to be successively transplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by perseverance in meekness, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themselves for this holy and happy society. Was this universally accepted, and did every man observe strictly every precept of the Gospel, the face of human affairs and the economy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but surely they would be changed for the better; and we should enjoy much more happiness, even here, than at present: for we must not forget, that evils are by it forbid as well as resistance; injuries as well as revenge; all unwillingness to diffuse the enjoyments of life, as well as solicitude to acquire them; all obstacles to ambition, as well as ambition itself; and therefore all contentions for power and interest would be at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than it now does. But this universal acceptance of such an offer was never expected from so depraved and imperfect a creature as man, and therefore could never have been any part of the design: for it was foreknown and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few would accept it on these terms. He says, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. vii. 14.) Accordingly we see, that very few are prevailed on by the hopes of future happiness, to relinquish the pursuit of present pleasures or interests, and therefore these pursuits are little interrupted by the secession of so inconsiderable a number. As the natural world subsists by the struggles of the same elements, so does the moral by the contentions of the same passions, as from the beginning. The generality of mankind are actuated by the same motives; fight, scuffle, and scramble for power, riches, and pleasures with the same eagerness: all occupations and professions are exercised with the same alacrity, and there are soldiers, lawyers, statesmen, patriots, and politicians, just as if Christianity had never existed. Thus, we see this wonderful dispensation has answered all the purposes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without subverting the constitution, policy, or business of the world, opened a gate, though a strait one, through which all, who are wise enough to choose it, and good enough to be fit for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have said, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodness could never have suffered it to have been so soon perverted from its original purity, to have continued in a state of corruption through the course of so many ages, and at last to have proved so ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To these I answer, that all this, on examination, will be found inevitable, from the nature of all revelations communicated to so imperfect a creature as man, and from circumstances peculiar to the rise and progress of the Christian in particular: for when this was first preached to the gentile nations, though they were not able to

withstand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it; yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquish their old superstitions, and former opinions, but chose rather to incorporate them with it. by which means it was necessarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worship by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philosophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnostics, Mystics, and Manichæans, the prevailing systems of those times. By degrees its irresistible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its interests, and it was supported by their patronage: but that patronage soon engaged it in their policies and contests, and destroyed that excellence by which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble professors of the Gospel enslaved these princes, and conquered these conquerors, their patrons, and erected for themselves such a stupendous fabric of wealth and power, as the world had never seen: they then propagated their religion by the same methods by which it had been persecuted; nations were converted by fire and sword, and the vanquished were baptized with daggers at their throats. All these events we see proceed from a chain of causes and consequences, which could not have been broken without changing the established course of things by a constant series of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature: whilst that continues as it is, the purest religion must be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches, and it will also then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is: because many are inclined to think, that every deviation from its primitive state is a corruption: Christianity was at first preached by the poor and mean, in holes and caverns, under the iron rod of persecution; and therefore many absurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its ministers, or of magnificence in its worship, are corruptions inconsistent with the genuine simplicity of its original state: they are offended, that modern bishops possess titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is notorious, that their predecessors the apostles were despicable wanderers, without houses, or money, and walked on foot. The apostles indeed lived in a state of poverty and persecution attendant on their particular situation, and the work which they had undertaken: this was their misfortune, but no part of their religion, and therefore it can be no more incumbent on their successors to imitate their poverty and meanness, than to be whipped, imprisoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. These are all but the suggestions of envy and malevolence, but no objections to these fortunate alterations in Christianity and its professors; which, if not abused to the purposes of tyranny and superstition, are in fact no more than the necessary and proper effects of its more prosperous situation. When a poor man grows rich, or a servant becomes a master, they should take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjust or insolent; but surely it is not requisite or right, that their behavior and mode of living should be exactly the same, when their situation is altered. How far this institution has

been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not easy now to ascertain, because the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time so far removed from our sight, that they are scarcely visible; but those of the most gigantic size still remain in the records of history, as monuments of the rest. Wars in those ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the present: whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and sword; and thousands of the vanquished were crucified and impaled for having endeavored only to defend themselves and their country. The lives of new-born infants were then entirely at the disposal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or to expose them to perish by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beasts; and this was frequently practised without punishment, and even without censure. Gladiators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diversion of the most polite assemblies; and though these combatants at first consisted of criminals only, by degrees men of the highest rank, and even ladies of the most illustrious families, enrolled themselves in this honorable list. On many occasions human sacrifices were ordained; and at the funerals of rich and eminent persons, great numbers of the slaves were murdered as victims pleasing to their departed spirits. The most infamous obscenities were made part of their religious worship, and the most unnatural lusts publicly avowed, and celebrated by their most admired poets. At the approach of Christianity all these horrid abominations vanished; and amongst those who first embraced it, scarce a single vice was to be found. To such an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and resignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they seem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature; and to have pursued such a constant and uniform course of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as, in the present times, it is almost as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is asked, why should not the belief of the same religion now produce the same effects? The answer is short, because it is not believed. The most sovereign medicine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be persuaded to take it. Yet, notwithstanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminishing the vices, and correcting the dispositions of mankind; and was it universally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both sin and punishment. But this was never expected, or designed, or possible, because, if their existence did not arise from some necessity to us unknown, they never would have been permitted to exist at all, and, therefore, they can no more be extirpated, than they could have been prevented. For this would certainly be incompatible with the frame and constitution of this world, and in all probability with that of another. And this, I think, well accounts for that reserve and obscurity with which this religion was at first promulgated, and that want of irresistible evidence of its truth, by which it might possibly have been enforced. Christ says to his disciples, "To you it is given to know the mystery

of the kingdom of God ; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables ; that seeing they may see, and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand ; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them." (Mark iv. 11, 12.) That is, to you by peculiar favor it is given to know and understand the doctrines of my religion, and by that means to qualify yourselves for the kingdom of heaven ; but to the multitude without, that is to all mankind in general, this indulgence cannot be extended : because that all men should be exempted from sin and punishment is utterly repugnant to the universal system, and that constitution of things, which Infinite Wisdom has thought proper to adopt.

Objections have likewise been raised to the divine authority of this religion from the incredibility of some of its doctrines, particularly of those concerning the Trinity, and atonement for sin by the sufferings and death of Christ ; the one contradicting all the principles of human reason, and the other all our ideas of divine justice. To these objections I shall only say, that no arguments, founded on principles which we cannot comprehend, can possibly disprove a proposition already proved on principles which we do understand ; and, therefore, that on this subject they ought not to be attended to. That three Beings should be one Being, is a proposition which certainly contradicts reason, that is, *our* reason, but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true ; for there are many propositions which contradict our reason, and yet are demonstrably true. One is the very first principle of all religion, the being of a God ; for that any thing should exist without a cause, or that any thing should be the cause of its own existence, are propositions equally contradictory to our reason ; yet one of them must be true, or nothing could ever have existed. In like manner the overruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain foreknowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of those events, are, to our apprehensions, absolute contradictions to each other ; and yet the truth of every one of these is demonstrable from Scripture, reason, and experience. All these difficulties arise from our imagining, that the mode of existence of all beings must be similar to our own ; that is, that they must all exist in time and space ; and hence proceeds our embarrassment on this subject. We know, that no two beings, with whose mode of existence we are acquainted, can exist in the same point of time in the same point of space, and that therefore they cannot be one ; but how far beings, whose mode of existence bears no relation to time or space, may be united, we cannot comprehend : and therefore the possibility of such a union we cannot positively deny. In like manner our reason informs us, that the punishment of the innocent, instead of the guilty, is diametrically opposite to justice, rectitude, and all pretensions to utility ; but we should also remember, that the short line of our reason cannot reach to the bottom of this question ; it cannot inform us by what means either guilt or punishment ever gained a place in the works of a Creator infinitely good and power-



ful, whose goodness must have induced him, and whose power must have enabled him to exclude them. It cannot assure us, that some sufferings of individuals are not necessary to the happiness and well-being of the whole. It cannot convince us, that they do not actually arise from this necessity, or that, for this cause, they may not be required of us, and levied like a tax for the public benefit; or that this tax may not be paid by one being, as well as another; and, therefore, if voluntarily offered, be justly accepted from the innocent instead of the guilty. Of all these circumstances we are totally ignorant; nor can our reason afford us any information, and, therefore, we are not able to assert, that this measure is contrary to justice, or void of utility. For, unless we could first resolve that great question, whence came evil? we can decide nothing on the dispensations of Providence; because they must necessarily be connected with that undiscoverable principle; and, as we know not the root of the disease, we cannot judge of what is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithstanding all the seeming absurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumstance much in its favor; which is, that it has been universally adopted in all ages, as far as history can carry us back in our inquiries to the earliest times; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religious opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appeasing their offended deities by sacrifices, that is, by the vicarious sufferings of men or other animals. This notion could never have been derived from reason, because it directly contradicts it; nor from ignorance, because ignorance could never have contrived so unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatsoever; nor from the artifice of kings or priests, in order to acquire dominion over the people, because it seems not adapted to this end, and we find it implanted in the minds of the most remote savages at this day discovered, who have neither kings nor priests, artifice nor dominion amongst them. It must, therefore, be derived from natural instinct, or supernatural revelation, both which are equally the operations of Divine power. It may be further urged, that however true these doctrines may be, yet it must be inconsistent with the justice and goodness of the Creator to require from his creatures the belief of propositions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reason, which he has thought proper to bestow upon them. To this I answer, that genuine Christianity requires no such belief. It has discovered to us many important truths, with which we were before entirely unacquainted; and amongst them are these, that three Beings are someway united in the Divine essence, and that God will accept of the sufferings of Christ as an atonement for the sins of mankind. These, considered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, nor are above the reach of human reason. The first is a proposition as plain, as that three equilateral lines compose one triangle; the other is as intelligible, as that one man should discharge the debts of another. In what manner this union is formed, or why God accepts these vicarious punishments, or to what pur-

poses they may be subservient, it informs us not, because no information could enable us to comprehend these mysteries, and therefore it does not require that we should know or believe any thing about them. The truth of these doctrines must rest entirely on the authority of those who taught them; but then we should reflect, that those were the same persons who taught us a system of religion more sublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to discover; but which, when discovered, are exactly consonant to our reason; and that, therefore, we should not hastily reject those informations which they have vouchsafed to give us, of which our reason is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of several propositions, by demonstrations which we understand, we hesitate not on his authority to assent to others, the process of whose proofs we are not able to follow; why, therefore, should we refuse that credit to Christ and his apostles, which we think reasonable to give to one another?

Many have objected to the whole scheme of this revelation as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjust, and unworthy of an omniscient and omnipotent author, who cannot be supposed to have favored particular persons, countries, and times, with this divine communication, while others, no less meritorious, have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own designs; that is, to have formed mankind able and disposed to render themselves miserable by their own wickedness, and then to have contrived so strange an expedient to restore them to that happiness, which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unnecessary interposition of a mediator. To all this I shall only say, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who see but as small a part of the Christian as of the universal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all these circumstances exactly analogous to each other. In all the dispensations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are distributed in a similar manner; health and strength, sense and science, wealth and power, are all bestowed on individuals and communities in different degrees and at different times. The whole economy of this world consists of evils and remedies; and these, for the most part, administered by the instrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourselves into poverty, distress, and misery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, instructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from these calamities. He has formed us subject to innumerable diseases, and he has bestowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirst, and nakedness, and he supplies us with food, drink, and clothing, usually by the administration of others. He has created poisons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the pestilential heats of the summer, and the summer's sunshine to dry up the inundations of the winter. Why the constitution of nature is so formed, why all the visible dispensations of Providence are such, and why such is the Christian dispensation also, we know not, nor have faculties to com-

prehend. God might certainly have made the material world a system of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Christian dispensation a scheme only of moral virtue, productive of happiness, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diseases, and our minds from all depravity, and we should then have stood in no need of medicines to restore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favor. It seems indeed to our ignorance, that this would have been more consistent with justice and reason; but his infinite wisdom has decided in another manner, and formed the systems, both of nature and Christianity, on other principles, and these so exactly similar, that we have cause to conclude, that they both must proceed from the same source of Divine power and wisdom, however inconsistent with our reason they may appear. Reason is undoubtedly our surest guide in all matters, which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence. On the subject of revelation her province is only to examine into its authority, and when that is once proved, she has no more to do, but to acquiesce in its doctrines, and, therefore, is never so ill employed, as when she pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, says this self-sufficient teacher, is perfectly wise just, and good; and what is the inference? That all his dispensations must be conformable to our notions of perfect wisdom, justice, and goodness; but it should first be proved, that man is as perfect and as wise as his Creator, or this consequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverse, that is, that the dispensations of a perfect and all-wise Being must probably appear unreasonable, and perhaps unjust, to a being imperfect and ignorant; and, therefore, their seeming impossibility may be a mark of their truth, and, in some measure, justify that pious rant of a mad enthusiast, "*Credo, quia impossibile.*" Nor is it the least surprising, that we are not able to understand the spiritual dispensations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no less incomprehensible. Our reason can afford us no insight into those great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elasticity, and electricity, nor even into the essence of matter itself. Can reason teach us how the sun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whose diameter contains many millions of miles, with a constant inundation of successive rays during thousands of years, without any perceivable diminution of that body, from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of those bodies on which they fall, and by which they are constantly absorbed? Can reason tell us how those rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon ball, can strike the tenderest organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain, or by what means this percussion only can convey the forms of distant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial essences? or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the soul, or the anxiety of the soul can emaciate and destroy the body? That all these things are so, we have visible and indisputable demonstration; but how they can be

so, is to us as incomprehensible as the most abstruse mysteries of revelation can possibly be. In short, we see so small a part of the great whole, we know so little of the relation, which the present life bears to pre-existent and future states; we can conceive so little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of existence; we can comprehend so little of the material, and so much less of the moral plan on which the universe is constituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from such a Being, on such subjects, was in every part familiar to our understandings, and consonant to our reason, we should have great cause to suspect its Divine authority; and, therefore, had this revelation been less incomprehensible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I shall not enter farther into the consideration of these abstruse and difficult speculations, because the discussion of them would render this short essay too tedious and laborious a task for the perusal of them, for whom it was principally intended; which are all those busy or idle persons, whose time and thoughts are wholly engrossed by the pursuits of business or pleasure, ambition or luxury, who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by desultory conversation or superficial reading, and have thence determined with themselves, that a pretended revelation, founded on so strange and improbable a story, so contradictory to reason, so adverse to the world and all its occupations, so incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts so impracticable, can be nothing more than the imposition of priestcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the superstitious vulgar. To talk to such about the Christian religion is to converse with the deaf concerning music, or with the blind on the beauties of painting. They want all ideas relative to the subject, and, therefore, can never be made to comprehend it. To enable them to do this, their minds must be formed for these conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abstraction from business and dissipation; by ill-health, disappointments, and distresses; and possibly by Divine interposition, or by enthusiasm, which is usually mistaken for it. Without some of these preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impossible that they can think or know, understand or believe, any thing about it. If they profess to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe, they deceive themselves. I am ready to acknowledge, that these gentlemen, as far as their information reaches, are perfectly in the right; and if they are endued with good understandings, which have been entirely devoted to the business or amusements of the world, they can pass no other judgment, and must revolt from the history and doctrines of this religion. "The preaching Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," (1 Cor. i. 23); and so it must appear to all, who, like them, judge from established prejudices, false learning, and superficial knowledge; for those who are quite unable to follow the chain of its prophecy, to see the beauty and justness of its moral precepts,

and to enter into the wonders of its dispensations, can form no other idea of this revelation, but that of a confused rhapsody of fictions and absurdities.

If it is asked, Was Christianity then intended only for learned divines and profound philosophers? I answer, No. It was at first preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to such are the practical, which are the most necessary parts of it, sufficiently intelligible; but the proofs of its authority undoubtedly are not, because these must be chiefly drawn from other parts, of a speculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhaustible discoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and dispensations of God, which cannot be understood without some learning, and much attention. From these the generality of mankind must necessarily be excluded, and must, therefore, trust to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. And hence, perhaps, it is, that faith, or easiness of belief, is so frequently, and so strongly recommended in the Gospel; because if men require proofs, of which they themselves are incapable, and those who have no knowledge on this important subject will not place some confidence in those who have, the illiterate and unattentive must ever continue in a state of unbelief. But then all such should remember, that in all sciences, even in the mathematics themselves, there are many propositions, which, on a cursory view, appear to the most acute understandings uninstructed in that science, to be impossible to be true, which yet, on a closer examination, are found to be truths capable of the strictest demonstration; and that, therefore, in disquisitions on which we cannot determine without much learned investigation, reason uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought surely to conclude, that it may be at least as possible for them to be mistaken in disbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for those great masters of reason and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addison, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief; a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the most diligent and learned researches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adversaries; a belief, which they have testified to the world by their writings, without any other motive than their regard for truth, and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treasures with which these learned writers have enriched the world; if they should be so fortunate as to persuade any of these minute philosophers to place some confidence in these great opinions, and to distrust their own; if they should be able to convince them, that, notwithstanding all unfavorable appearances, Christianity may not be altogether artifice and error; if they should prevail on them to examine it with some attention, or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all; the purpose of this little work will be sufficiently answered. Had the arguments herein used, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely discussed, it might easily have been extended to a more considerable bulk;

but then the busy would not have had leisure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honor to be admitted into such good company, they will immediately, I know, determine, that it must be the work of some enthusiast or methodist, some beggar or some madman. I shall, therefore, beg leave to assure them, that the author is very far removed from all these characters. That he once, perhaps, believed as little as themselves; but having some leisure, and more curiosity, he employed them both in resolving a question, which seemed to him of some importance—Whether Christianity was really an imposture founded on an absurd, incredible, and obsolete fable, as many suppose it? Or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interposition of supernatural power? On a candid inquiry, he soon found, that the first was an absolute impossibility, and that its pretensions to the latter were founded on the most solid grounds. In the farther pursuit of his examination he perceived, at every step, new lights arising, and some of the brightest from parts of it the most obscure, but productive of the clearest proofs, because equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reason to discover. These arguments, which have convinced him of the Divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and concise a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the same effect upon others, and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Christians in the world, it would be beneficial to themselves, and by no means detrimental to the public.



A

**SHORT AND EASY  
METHOD WITH THE DEISTS.**

**IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.**

BY

**THE REV. CHARLES LESLIE, M. A.**





## SHORT AND EASY METHOD WITH THE DEISTS.

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SIR—In answer to yours of the third instant, I much condole with you your unhappy circumstances, of being placed among such company, where, as you say, you continually hear the sacred Scriptures, and the histories therein contained, particularly of Moses, and of Christ, and all revealed religion, turned into ridicule by men who set up for sense and reason. And they say, that there is no greater ground to believe in Christ than in Mohammed; that all these pretences to revelation are cheats, and ever have been among Pagans, Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians; that they are all alike impositions of cunning and designing men, upon the credulity, at first, of simple and unthinking people, till, their numbers increasing, their delusions grew popular, came at last to be established by laws; and then the force of education and custom gives a bias to the judgments of after ages, till such deceits come really to be believed, being received upon trust from the ages foregoing, without examining into the original and bottom of them. Which these our modern men of sense (as they desire to be esteemed) say, that they only do, that they only have their judgments freed from the slavish authority of precedents and laws, in matters of truth, which, they say, ought only to be decided by reason; though by a prudent compliance with popularity and laws, they preserve themselves from outrage, and legal penalties; for none of their complexion are addicted to sufferings or martyrdom.

Now, sir, that which you desire from me, is, some short topic of reason, if such can be found, whereby, without running to authorities, and the intricate mazes of learning, which breed long disputes, and which these men of reason deny by wholesale, though they can give no reason for it, only suppose that authors have been trumped upon us, interpolated, and corrupted, so that no stress can be laid upon them, though it cannot be shown wherein they are so corrupted; which, in reason, ought to lie upon them to prove who allege it; otherwise it is not only a precarious, but a guilty plea: and the more, that they refrain not to quote books on their side, for whose authority there are no better, or not so good grounds. However, you say, it makes your disputes endless, and they go away with

noise and clamor, and a boast, that there is nothing, at least nothing certain, to be said on the Christian side. Therefore you are desirous to find some *one topic of reason*, which should demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time distinguish it from the impostures of Mohammed, and the old Pagan world: that our deists may be brought to this test, and be either obliged to renounce their reason, and the common reason of mankind, or to submit to the clear proof, from reason, of the Christian religion, which must be such a proof as no imposture can pretend to, otherwise it cannot prove the Christian religion not to be an imposture. And whether such a proof, one single proof, (to avoid confusion) is not to be found out, you desire to know from me.

And you say, that you cannot imagine but there must be such a proof, because every truth is in itself clear, and one; and therefore that one reason for it, if it be the true reason, must be sufficient; and, if sufficient, it is better than many; for multiplicity confounds, especially to weak judgments.

Sir, you have imposed a hard task upon me: I wish I could perform it: for though every truth is one, yet our sight is so feeble, that we cannot always come to it directly, but by many inferences, and laying of things together.

But I think, that in the case before us, there is such a proof as you require, and I will set it down as short and plain as I can.

I. First, then, I suppose, that the truth of the doctrine of Christ will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact which are recorded of him in the gospels be true; for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what he delivered.

The same is to be said as to Moses. If he brought the children of Israel through the Red sea, in that miraculous manner, which is related in Exodus, and did such other wonderful things as are there told of him, it must necessarily follow, that he was sent from God. These being the strongest proofs we can desire, and which every deist will confess he would acquiesce in, if he saw them with his eyes. Therefore the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.

And the method I will take, is, first, to lay down such rules as to the truth of matters of fact, in general, that where they all meet, such matters of fact cannot be false. And then, secondly, to show that all these rules do meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; and that they do not meet in the matters of fact of Mohammed, of the heathen deities, nor can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever.

The rules are these:

1. That the matter of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it.
2. That it be done publicly, in the face of the world.
3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions to be performed.
4. That such monuments and such actions or observances be

instituted, and do commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.

The two first rules make it impossible for any such matter of fact to be imposed upon men, at the time when such matter of fact was said to be done, because every man's eyes and senses would contradict it. For example; suppose any man should pretend, that yesterday he divided the Thames, in presence of all the people of London, and carried the whole city, men, women, and children, over to Southwark on dry land, the water standing like walls on both sides: I say, it is morally impossible that he could persuade the people of London, that this was true, when every man, woman, and child, could contradict him, and say, this was a notorious falsehood, for that they had not seen the Thames so divided, nor had gone over on dry land. Therefore I take it for granted, (and I suppose, with the allowance of all the deists in the world) that no such imposition could be put upon men, at the time when such public matter of fact was said to be done.

Therefore it only remains, that such matter of fact might be invented some time after, when the men of that generation, wherein the thing was said to be done, are all past and gone; and the credulity of after ages might be imposed upon, to believe that things were done in former ages, which were not.

And for this the two last rules secure us as much as the two first rules, in the former case; for whenever such a matter of fact came to be invented, if not only monuments were said to remain of it, but likewise that public actions and observances were constantly used ever since the matter of fact was said to be done; the deceit must be detected, by no such monuments appearing, and by the experience of every man, woman, and child, who must know that no such actions or observances were ever used by them. For example; suppose I should now invent a story of such a thing, done a thousand years ago, I might perhaps get some to believe it; but if I say, that not only such a thing was done, but that from that day to this, every man, at the age of twelve years, had a joint of his little finger cut off; and that every man in the nation did want a joint of such a finger; and that this institution was said to be part of the matter of fact done so many years ago, and vouched as a proof and confirmation of it, and as having descended without interruption, and been constantly practised, in memory of such matter of fact all along, from the time that such matter of fact was done: I say, it is impossible I should be believed in such a case, because every one could contradict me, as to the mark of cutting off a joint of the finger; and that being part of my original matter of fact, must demonstrate the whole to be false.

II. Let us now come to the second point, to show, that the matters of fact of Moses, and of Christ, have all these rules or marks before mentioned; and that neither the matters of fact of Mohammed, or what is reported of the heathen deities, have the like; and that no imposture can have them all.

As to Moses, I suppose it will be allowed me, that he could not

have persuaded six hundred thousand men, that he had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red sea; fed them forty years without bread, by miraculous manna, and the other matters of fact recorded in his books, if they had not been true. Because every man's senses that were then alive, must have contradicted it. And therefore he must have imposed upon all their senses, if he could have made them believe it, when it was false, and no such things done. So that here are the first and second of the above mentioned four marks.

For the same reason it was equally impossible for him to have made them receive his five books as truth; and not to have rejected them, as a manifest imposture; which told of all these things as done before their eyes, if they had not been so done. See how positively he speaks to them, Deut. xi. 2—8, "And know you this day, for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt, unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt and unto all his land, and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots; how he made the water of the Red sea to overflow them as they pursued after you; and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day: and what he did unto you in the wilderness until ye came into this place; and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben, how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord, which he did," &c.

From hence we must suppose it impossible that these books of Moses, (if an imposture) could have been invented and put upon the people, who were then alive when all these things were said to be done.

The utmost, therefore, that even a *suppose* can stretch to, is, that these books were wrote in some age after Moses, and put out in his name.

And to this I say, that if it was so, it was impossible that those books should have been received, as the books of Moses, in that age wherein they may have been supposed to have been first invented. Why? Because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from his time. "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book until they were finished; that Moses commanded the Levites, who bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee," Deut. xxxi. 24—26. And there was a copy of this book to be left likewise with the king. "And it shall be when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of

his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes to do them," Deut. xvii. 18, 19.

Here, you see that this book of the law, speaks of itself, not only as a history or relation of what things were then done: but as the standing and municipal law and statutes of the nation of the Jews, binding the king as well as the people.

Now, in whatever age after Moses you will suppose this book to have been forged, it was impossible it could be received as truth; because it was not then to be found, either in the ark, or with the king, or anywhere else: for when first invented, every body must know, that they had never heard of it before.

And therefore they could less believe it to be the book of their statutes, and the standing law of the land, which they had all along received, and by which they had been governed.

Could any man, now at this day, invent a book of statutes or acts of parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes that ever they had known? As impossible was it for the books of Moses (if they were invented in any age after Moses) to have been received for what they declared themselves to be, viz. the statutes and municipal law of the nation of the Jews: and to have persuaded the Jews, that they had owned and acknowledged these books, all along from the days of Moses, to that day in which they were first invented, that is, that they had owned them before they had ever so much as heard of them. Nay, more, the whole nation must, in an instant, forget their former laws and government, if they could receive these books as being their former laws. And they could not otherwise receive them, because they vouched themselves so to be. Let me ask the deist but this one short question, Was there ever a book of sham laws, which were not the laws of the nation, palmed upon any people, since the world began? If not, with what face can they say this, of the book of laws of the Jews? Why will they say that of them, which they confess impossible in any nation, or among any people?

But they must be yet more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have a farther demonstration of their truth, than even other law books have; for they not only contain the laws, but give an historical account of their institution, and the practice of them from that time: as of the passover, Numbers viii. 17, 18, in memory of the death of the first-born in Egypt: and that the same day, all the first-born of Israel both of man and beast, were by a perpetual law, dedicated to God: and the Levites taken for all the first-born of the children of Israel. That Aaron's rod which budded, was kept in the ark, in memory of the rebellion and wonderful destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and for the confirmation of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. As likewise the pot of manna, in memory of their having been fed with it forty years in the wilderness. That the brazen serpent was kept (which remained to the days of Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 4,) in memory of that wonderful deliverance, by only looking upon it, from the biting of the fiery serpents, Numb.

xxi. 9. The feast of pentecost, in memory of the dreadful appearance of God upon mount Horeb, &c.

And, besides these remembrances of particular actions and occurrences, there were other solemn institutions in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt in the general, which included all the particulars, as of the sabbath, Deut. v. 15. Their daily sacrifices, and yearly expiation, their new moons, and several feasts and fasts. So that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, daily remembrances, and recognitions of these things.

And not only so, but the books of the same Moses tell us, that a particular tribe [of Levi] was appointed and consecrated by God as his priests; by whose hands and none other, the sacrifices of the people were to be offered, and these solemn institutions to be celebrated. That it was death for any other to approach the altar. That their high priest wore a glorious mitre, and magnificent robes of God's own contrivance, with the miraculous Urim and Thummim in his breast-plate, whence the divine responses were given. That at his word, the king, and all the people were to go out, and to come in, Num. xxvii. 21. That these Levites were likewise the chief judges, even in all civil causes, and that it was death to resist their sentence, Deut. xvii. 8—13; 1 Chron. xxiii. 4. Now whenever it can be supposed that these books of Moses were forged, in some ages after Moses, it is impossible they could have been received as true, unless the forgers could have made the whole nation believe, that they had received these books from their fathers, had been instructed in them when they were children, and had taught them to their children; moreover, that they had all been circumcised, and did circumcise their children, in pursuance to what was commanded in these books: that they had observed the yearly passover, the weekly sabbath, the new moons, and all these several feasts, fasts, and ceremonies, commanded in these books: that they had never eaten any swine's flesh, or other meats prohibited in these books; that they had a magnificent tabernacle, with a visible priesthood to administer in it, which was confined to the tribe of Levi; over whom was placed a glorious high priest, clothed with great and mighty prerogative, whose death only could deliver those that were fled to the cities of refuge. And that these priests were their ordinary judges, even in civil matters, Num. xxxv. 25, 28. I say, was it possible to have persuaded a whole nation of men, that they had known and practised all these things, if they had not done it? or, secondly, to have received a book for truth, which said they had practised them, and appealed to that practice; so that here are the third and fourth of the marks above mentioned.

But now let us descend to the utmost degree of supposition, viz. that these things were practised, before these books of Moses were forged; and that these books did only impose upon the nation, in making them believe, that they had kept these observances in memory of such and such things, as were inserted in these books.

Well then let us proceed upon this supposition, (however groundless,) and now, will not the same impossibilities occur, as in the

former case? For first, this must suppose that the Jews kept all these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing any thing of their original, or the reason why they kept them. Whereas these very observances did express the ground and reason of their being kept, as the passover in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, in that night wherein he slew all the first-born of Egypt, and so of the rest.

But secondly, let us suppose, contrary both to reason and matter of fact, that the Jews did not know any reason at all why they kept these observances; yet was it possible to put it upon them, that they had kept these observances in memory of what they had never heard of before that day, whensoever you will suppose that these books of Moses were first forged? For example, suppose I should now forge some romantic story of strange things done a thousand years ago, and in confirmation of this, should endeavor to persuade the Christian world, that they had all along, from that day to this, kept the first day of the week in memory of such a hero, an Apollonius, a Barcosbas, or a Mohammed; and had all been baptized in his name; and swore by his name, and upon that very book, (which I had then forged, and which they never saw before,) in their public judicatures; that this book was their gospel and law, which they had ever since that time, these thousand years past, universally received and owned, and none other. I would ask any deist, whether he thinks it possible, that such a cheat could pass, or such a legend be received as the gospel of Christians; and that they could be made believe, that they never had any other gospel? The same reason is as to the books of Moses, and must be, as to every matter of fact, which has all the four marks before mentioned; and these marks secure any such matter of fact as much from being invented and imposed in any after ages, as at the time when such matters of fact were said to be done.

Let me give one very familiar example more in this case. There is the Stonehenge in Salisbury Plain, every body knows it; and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what.

Now suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and tell there, that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions. And for a farther confirmation of this, should say, in this book, that it was wrote at the time when such actions were done, and by the very actors themselves, or eye-witnesses. And that this book had been received as truth, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since. Moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children, and that we did teach it to our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children. I ask any deist, whether he thinks this could pass upon England? And whether, if I, or any other should insist upon it, we should not, instead of being believed, be sent to Bedlam?

Now let us compare this with the Stonehenge, as I may call it, or



twelve great stones set up at Gilgal, which is told in the fourth chapter of Joshua. It is there said, verse 6, that the reason why they were set up, was, that when their children, in after ages, should ask the meaning of it, it should be told them.

And the thing in memory of which they were set up, was such as could not possibly be imposed upon that nation, at that time, when it was said to be done: it was as wonderful and miraculous as their passage through the Red sea.

And withal, free from a very poor objection, which the deists have advanced against that miracle of the Red sea: thinking to solve it by a spring tide, with the concurrence of a strong wind, happening at the same time, which left the sand so dry, as that the Israelites being all foot, might pass through the oozy places and holes, which it must be supposed the sea left behind it: but that the Egyptians being all horse and chariots, stuck in those holes and were entangled, so as that they could not march so fast as the Israelites: and that this was all the meaning of its being said, that God took off their [the Egyptians] chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily. So that they would make nothing extraordinary, at least, not miraculous in all this action.

This is advanced in Le Clerc's Dissertations upon Genesis, lately printed in Holland, and that part with others of the like tendency, endeavoring to resolve other miracles, as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, &c. into the mere natural causes, are put into English by the well known T. Brown, for the edification of the deists in England.

But these gentlemen have forgotten, that the Israelites had great herds of many thousand cattle with them; which would be apter to stray, and fall into those holes, and oozy places in the sand, than horses with riders, who might direct them.

But such precarious and silly supposes are not worth the answering. If there had been no more in this passage through the Red sea, than that of a spring tide, &c. it had been impossible for Moses to have made the Israelites believe the relation given of it in Exodus, with so many particulars, which themselves saw to be true.

And all those scriptures which magnify this action, and appeal to it as a full demonstration of the miraculous power of God, must be reputed as romance or legend.

I say this for the sake of some Christians, who think it no prejudice to the truth of the Holy Bible, but rather an advantage, as rendering it more easy to be believed, if they can solve whatever seems miraculous in it, by the power of second causes; and so to make all, as they speak, natural and easy. Wherein if they could prevail, the natural and easy result would be, not to believe one word in all those sacred oracles. For, if things be not as they are told in any relation, that relation must be false. And if false in part, we cannot trust to it, either in whole or in part.

Here are to be excepted, mistranslations, and errors, either in copy, or in press. But where there is no room for supposing of these, as where all copies do agree; there we must either receive all, or reject all. I mean in any book that pretends to be written

from the mouth of God. For in other common histories, we may believe part and reject part, as we see cause.

But to return. The passage of the Israelites over Jordan, in memory of which those stones at Gilgal were set up, is free from all those little carpings before mentioned, that are made as to the passage through the Red sea. For notice was given to the Israelites the day before, of this great miracle to be done, Josh. iii. 5. It was done at noon day, before the whole nation. And when the waters of Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when that river overflowed all its banks, verse 15. And it was done, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds must take to do it; but all on the sudden, as soon as the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, then the waters which came down from above, stood and rose up upon a heap, very far from the city Adam, that is besides Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over, right against Jericho. The priests stood in the midst of Jordan, till all the armies of Israel had passed over. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, were come up, out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lift up upon the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan, on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers, in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then shall ye let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over; as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever; chapter iv. from verse 18.

If the passage of the Red sea had been only taking advantage of a spring tide, or the like, how would this teach all the people of the earth that the hand of the Lord was mighty? How would a thing no more remarkable, have been taken notice of through all the world? How would it have taught Israel to fear the Lord, when they must know, that notwithstanding all of these big words, there was so little in it? How could they have believed, or received a book, as truth, which they knew, told the matter so far otherwise from what it was?

But, as I said, this passage over Jordan, which is here compared to that of the Red sea, is free from those cavils that are made as to that of the Red sea, and is a farther attestation to it, being said to be done in the same manner as was that of the Red sea.

Now, to form our argument, let us suppose, that there never was any such thing as that passage over Jordan. That these stones at

Gilgal were set up upon some other occasion, in some after age. And then that some designing man invented this book of Joshua, and said, that it was written by Joshua, at that time. And gave this stonage at Gilgal for a testimony of the truth of it. Would not every body say to him, We know the stonage at Gilgal; but we never heard before of this reason for it? Nor of this book of Joshua? Where has it been all this while? And where and how came you, after so many ages, to find it? Besides, this book tells us, that this passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age; and therefore, that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it when we were children; nor did ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not likely that it could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage did continue, which was set up for that, and no other end!

And if, for the reason before given, no such imposition could be put upon us, as to the stonage at Salisbury Plain; how much less could it be as to the stonage at Gilgal!

And if where we know not the reason of a bare naked monument, such a sham reason cannot be imposed: how much more is it impossible to impose upon us, in actions and observances, which we celebrate in memory of particular passages! How impossible to make us forget those passages which we daily commemorate; and persuade us, that we had always kept such institutions in memory of what we never heard of before; that is, that we knew it, before we knew it.

And if we find it thus impossible for an imposition to be put upon us, even in some things, which have not all the four marks before mentioned; how much more impossible is it, that any deceit should be in that thing, where all the four marks do meet!

This has been shown in the first place, as to the matters of fact of Moses.

Therefore I come now, secondly, to show, that, as in the matters of fact of Moses, so likewise, all these four marks do meet in the matters of fact, which are recorded in the gospel of our blessed Saviour. And my work herein will be the shorter, because all that is said before, of Moses and his books, is every way as applicable to Christ and his gospel. His works and miracles are there said to be done publicly, in the face of the world, as he argued to his accusers; "I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I said nothing," John xviii. 20. It is told, Acts ii. 41, that three thousand at one time; chap. iv. 4, that above five thousand at another time, were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen, what had been done publicly before their eyes, wherein it was impossible to have imposed upon them. Therefore here were the two first of the rules before mentioned.

Then for the two second: baptism and the Lord's supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things; and they were not instituted in after ages, but at the very time when these things were said to be done; and have been observed without interruption,

in all ages through the whole Christian world, down all the way from that time to this. And Christ himself did ordain apostles, and other ministers of his gospel, to preach, and administer these sacraments; and to govern his church; and that "always, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii. 20. Accordingly they have continued by regular succession to this day; and, no doubt, ever shall, while the earth shall last. So that the Christian clergy are as notorious a matter of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. And the gospel is as much a law to the Christians, as the book of Moses to the Jews. And it being part of the matter of fact related in the gospel, that such an order of men were appointed by Christ, and to continue to the end of the world; consequently, if the gospel was a fiction, and invented (as it must be) in some ages after Christ; then, at that time, when it was first invented, there could be no such order of clergy, as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; which must give the lie to the gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. And the matters of fact of Christ being pressed to be true, no otherwise than as there was, at that time (whenever the deists will suppose the gospel to be forged) not only public sacraments of Christ's institution, but an order of clergy, likewise of his appointment to administer them: and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible that they should be received when invented. And therefore, by what was said above, it was as impossible to have imposed upon mankind in this matter, by inventing of it in after ages, as at the time when those things were said to be done.

The matters of fact of Mohammed, or what is fabled of the deities, do all want some of the aforesaid four rules, whereby the certainty of matters of fact is demonstrated. First, Mohammed pretended to no miracles, as he tells us in his Alcoran, c. 6, &c. and those which are commonly told of him pass among the Mohammedans themselves but as legendary fables; and, as such, are rejected by the wise and learned among them; as the legends of their saints are in the church of Rome. See Dr. Prideaux's *Life of Mohammed*, page 34.

But, in the next place, those which are told of him, do all want the two first rules before mentioned. For his pretended converse with the moon; his Mersa, or night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c. were not performed before any body. We have only his own word for them. And they are as groundless as the delusions of Fox, or Muggleton, among ourselves. The same is to be said (in the second place) of the fables of the heathen gods, of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupiter's turning himself into a bull, and the like; besides the folly and unworthiness of such senseless pretended miracles. And moreover, the wise among the heathen did reckon no otherwise of these but as fables, which had a mythology, or mystical meaning in them, of which several of them have given us the rationale, or explication. And it is plain enough that Ovid meant no other by all his *Metamorphoses*.

It is true, the heathen deities had their priests: they had likewise

feasts, games, and other public institutions in memory of them. But all these want the fourth mark, viz. That such priesthood and institutions should commence from the time that such things as they commemorate were said to be done; otherwise they cannot secure after ages from the imposture, by detecting it, at the time when first invented, as hath been argued before. But the Bacchanalia, and other heathen feasts, were instituted many ages after what was reported of these gods was said to be done, and therefore can be no proof of them. And the priests of Bacchus, Apollo, &c., were not ordained by these supposed gods: but were appointed by others, in after ages, only in honor to them. And therefore these orders of priests are no evidence to the truth of the matters of fact, which are reported of their gods.

III. Now, to apply what has been said, you may challenge all the deists in the world to show any action that is fabulous, which has all the four rules, or marks before mentioned. No, it is impossible. And (to resume a little what is spoken to before) the histories of Exodus and the gospel could never have been received, if they had not been true; because the institution of the priesthood of Levi, and of Christ; of the sabbath, the passover, of circumcision, of baptism, and the Lord's supper, &c., are there related, as descending all the way down from those times without interruption. And it is full as impossible to persuade men, that they had been circumcised, baptized, had circumcised or baptized their children, celebrated passovers, sabbaths, sacraments, &c., under the government, and administration of a certain order of priests, if they had done none of these things, as to make them believe that they had gone through sea upon dry land, seen the dead raised, &c. And without believing of these, it was impossible that either the law, or the gospel, could have been received.

And the truth of the matters of fact of Exodus and the gospel, being no otherwise pressed upon men than as they have practised such public institutions; it is appealing to the senses of mankind for the truth of them; and makes it impossible for any to have invented such stories in after ages, without a palpable detection of the cheat, when first invented; as impossible as to have imposed upon the senses of mankind at the time when such public matters of fact were said to be done.

IV. I do not say, that every thing which wants these four marks is false: but, that nothing can be false which has them all.

I have no manner of doubt, that there was such a man as Julius Cæsar; that he fought at Pharsalia, was killed in the senate-house; and many other matters of fact of ancient times, though we keep no public observances in memory of them.

But this shows that the matters of fact of Moses and Christ, have come down to us better guarded than any other matters of fact how true soever.

And yet our deists, who would laugh any man out of the world, as an irrational brute, that should offer to deny Cæsar or Alexander, Homer or Virgil, their public works and actions, do, at the same

time, value themselves as the only men of wit and sense, of free, generous, and unbiassed judgments, for ridiculing the histories of Moses and Christ, that are infinitely better attested, and guarded with infallible marks, which the others want.

V. Besides that, the importance of the subject would oblige all men to inquire more narrowly into the one than the other: for what consequence is it to me, or to the world, whether there was such a man as Cæsar; whether he beat, or was beaten at Pharsalia; whether Homer or Virgil wrote such books; and whether what is related in the *Iliads* or *Æniads* be true or false? It was not two pence up or down to any man in the world. And therefore it is worth no man's while to inquire into it, either to oppose or justify the truth of these relations.

But our very souls and bodies, both this life and eternity, are concerned in the truth of what is related in the Holy Scriptures; and therefore men would be more inquisitive to search into the truth of these, than of any other matters of fact; examine and sift them narrowly; and find out the deceit, if any such could be found: for it concerned them nearly, and was of the last importance to them.

How unreasonable then is it to reject these matters of fact so sifted, so examined, and so attested as no other matters of fact in the world ever were; and yet to think it the most highly unreasonable, even to madness, to deny other matters of fact, which have not the thousandth part of their evidence, and are of no consequence at all to us, whether true or false!

VI. There are several other topics, from whence the truth of the Christian religion is evinced to all who judge by reason, and give themselves leave to consider. As the improbability that ten or twelve poor illiterate fishermen should form a design of converting the whole world to believe their delusions; and the impossibility of their effecting it, without force of arms, learning, oratory, or any one visible thing that could recommend them! And to impose a doctrine quite opposite to the lusts and pleasures of men, and all worldly advantages, or enjoyments! And this in an age of so great learning and sagacity, as that wherein the gospel was first preached! That these apostles should not only undergo all the scorn and contempt, but the severest persecutions, and most cruel deaths that could be inflicted, in attestation to what themselves knew to be a mere deceit and forgery of their own contriving! Some have suffered for errors which they thought to be truth; but never any for what themselves knew to be lies. And the apostles must know what they taught to be lies, if it was so, because they spoke of those things which they said they had both seen and heard, had looked upon, and handled with their hands, &c., Acts iv. 20; 1 John i. 1.

Neither can it be said that they, perhaps, might have proposed some temporal advantages to themselves, but missed of them, and met with sufferings instead of them: for, if it had been so, it is more probable, that when they saw their disappointment, they would have discovered their conspiracy; especially when they might not

only have saved their lives, but got great rewards for doing it; than that no one of them should ever have been brought to do this.

But this is not all; for they tell us that their Master bid them expect nothing but sufferings in this world. This is the tenure of all that gospel which they taught. And they told the same to all whom they converted. So that here was no disappointment.

For, all that were converted by them, were converted upon the certain expectation of sufferings, and bidden prepare for it. Christ commanded his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him; and told them, that in the world they should have tribulation; that whoever did not forsake father, mother, wife, children, lands, and their very lives, could not be his disciples; that he, who sought to save his life in this world, should lose it in the next.

Now, that this despised doctrine of the cross should prevail so universally against the allurements of flesh and blood, and all the blandishments of this world; against the rage and persecution of all the kings and powers of the earth, must show its original to be divine, and its protector almighty. What is it else, could conquer without arms, persuade without rhetoric, overcome enemies, disarm tyrants, and subdue empires without opposition!

VII. We may add to all this, the testimonies of the most bitter enemies and persecutors of Christianity, both Jews and Gentiles, to the truth of the matter of fact of Christ, such as Josephus and Tacitus; of which the first flourished about forty years after the death of Christ, and the other about seventy years after: so that they were capable of examining into the truth, and wanted not prejudice and malice sufficient to have inclined them to deny the matter of fact itself of Christ: but their confessing to it, as likewise Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian the apostate; the Moham-medans since, and all other enemies of Christianity that have arisen in the world, is an undeniable attestation to the truth of the matter of fact.

VIII. But there is another argument more strong and convincing than even this matter of fact; more than the certainty of what I see with my eyes: and which the apostle Peter called a more sure word, that is, proof, that what he saw and heard upon the holy mount, when our blessed Savior was transfigured before him and two other of the apostles: for, having repeated that passage as a proof of that whereof they were eye-witnesses, and heard the voice from heaven giving attestation to our Lord Christ, 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18. He says, ver. 19, We have also a more sure word of prophecy for the proof of this Jesus being the Messiah, that is, the prophecies which had gone before of him, from the beginning of the world; and all exactly fulfilled in him.

Men may dispute an imposition or delusion upon our outward senses; but how can that be false that has been so long, even from the beginning of the world, and so often by all the prophets, in several ages foretold; how can this be an imposition, or a forgery?

This is particularly insisted on in the "Method with the Jews:" and even the deists must confess, that that book we call the Old

Testament, was in the hands of the Jews long before our Saviour came into the world. And if they will be at the pains to compare the prophecies that are there of the Messiah, with the fulfilling of them, as to time, place, and all other circumstances, in the person, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our blessed Saviour, will find this proof what our apostles here calls it, a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts; which God grant. Here is no possibility of deceit or imposture.

Old prophecies, (and all these so agreeing) could not have been contrived to countenance a new cheat: and nothing could be a cheat that could fulfill all these.

For this, therefore, I refer the deists to the "Method with the Jews."

I desire them likewise to look there, sect. xi. and consider the prophecies given so long ago, of which they see the fulfilling at this day, with their own eyes, of the state of the Jews, for many ages past, and at present; without a king, or priest, or temple, or sacrifice, scattered to the four winds, sifted as with a sieve, among all nations; yet so preserved, and always to be, a distinct people from all others of the whole earth. Whereas those mighty monarchies which oppressed the Jews, and which commanded the world in their turns; and had the greatest human prospect of perpetuity, were to be extinguished as they have been, even that their names should be blotted out from under heaven.

As likewise, that as remarkable of our blessed Saviour, concerning the preservation and progress of the Christian church, when in her swaddling clothes, consisting only of a few poor fishermen. Not by the sword, as that of Mohammed, but under all the persecution of men and hell; which yet should not prevail against her.

But though I offer these, as not to be slighted by the deists, to which they can show nothing equal in all profane history; and in which it is impossible any cheat can lie; yet I put them not upon the same foot as the prophecies before mentioned of the marks and coming of the Messiah, which have been since the world began.

And that general expectation of the whole earth, at the time of his coming, insisted upon in the "Method with the Jews," sect. v. is greatly to be noticed.

But, I say, the foregoing prophecies of our Saviour, are so strong a proof, as even miracles would not be sufficient to break their authority.

I mean, if it were possible that a true miracle could be wrought in contradiction to them. For that would be for God to contradict himself.

But no sign or wonder, that could possibly be solved, should shake this evidence.

It is this that keeps the Jews in their obstinacy. Though they cannot deny the matters of fact done by our blessed Saviour, to be truly miracles, if so done as said. Nor can they deny that they were so done, because they have all the four marks before men-



tioned. Yet they cannot yield! Why? Because they think that the gospel is in contradiction to the law. Which, if it were, the consequence would be unavoidable, that both could not be true. To solve this, is the business of the "Method with the Jews." But the contradiction, which they suppose, is in their comments that they put upon the law; especially they expect a literal fulfilling of those promises of the restoration of Jerusalem, and outward glories of the church, of which there is so frequent mention in the books of Moses, the Psalms, and all the prophets. And many Christians do expect the same; and take those texts as literally as the Jews do. We do believe and pray for the conversion of the Jews. For this end they have been so miraculously preserved, according to the prophecies so long before of it. And when that time shall come, as they are the most honorable and ancient of all the nations on the earth, so will their church return to be the mother Christian church, as she was at first; and Rome must surrender to Jerusalem. Then all nations will flow thither. And even Ezekiel's temple may be literally built there, in the metropolis of the whole earth; which Jerusalem must be, when the fullness of the gentiles, shall meet with the conversion of the Jews. For no nation will contend with the Jews, nor church with Jerusalem for supremacy. All nations will be ambitious to draw their original from the Jews, whose are the fathers, and from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came.

Then will be fulfilled that outward grandeur and restoration of the Jews and of Jerusalem, which they expect, pursuant to the prophecies.

They pretend not that this is limited to any particular time of the reign of the Messiah. They are sure it will not be at the beginning; for they expect to go through great conflicts and trials with their Messiah (as the Christian church has done) before his final conquest, and that they come to reign with him. So that this is no obstruction to their embracing of Christianity. They see the same things fulfilled in us, which they expect themselves; and we expect the same things they do.

I tell this to the deists, lest they may think that the Jews have some stronger arguments than they know of; that they are not persuaded by the miracles of our blessed Saviour, and by the fulfilling of all the prophecies in him, that were made concerning the Messiah.

As I said before, I would not plead even miracles against these.

And if this is sufficient to persuade a Jew, it is much more so to a deist, who labors not under these objections.

Besides I would not seem to clash with that (in a sound sense) reasonable caution, used by Christian writers, not to put the issue of the truth wholly upon miracles, without this addition, when not done in contradiction to the revelations already given in the holy Scriptures.

And they do it upon this consideration, though it is impossible to suppose that God would work a real miracle, in contradiction to what he has already revealed; yet men may be imposed upon by

false and seeming miracles, and pretended revelations, (as there are many examples, especially in the church of Rome,) and so may be shaken in the faith, if they keep not to the holy Scriptures as their rule.

We are told, 2 Thess. xi. 9, of him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders. And Rev. xiii. 14, xvi. 14, and xix. 20, of the devil, and false prophets, working miracles. But the word, in all these places, in only *semeia*, *signs*, that is, as it is rendered, Matt. xxv. 24, which though sometimes it may be used to signify real miracles, yet not always, nor in these places. For though every miracle be a sign and a wonder, yet every sign, or wonder, is not a miracle.

IX. Here it may be proper to consider a common topic of the deists, who, when they are not able to stand out against the evidence of fact, that such and such miracles have been done; then turn about and deny such things to be miracles, at least, that we can never be sure whether any wonderful thing that is shown to us be a true or a false miracle.

And the great argument they go upon is this, that a miracle being that which exceeds the power of nature, we cannot know what exceeds it, unless we know the utmost extent of the power of nature: and no man pretends to know that; therefore, that no man can certainly know whether any event be miraculous. And, consequently, he may be cheated in his judgment between true and false miracles.

To which I answer, that men may be so cheated, and there are many examples of it.

But that though we may not always know when we are cheated, yet we can certainly tell, in many cases, when we are not cheated.

For though we do not know the utmost extent of the power of nature, perhaps, in any one thing; yet it does not follow, that we know not the nature of any thing, in some measure; and that certainly too. For example; though I do not know the utmost extent of the power of fire, yet I certainly know, that it is the nature of fire to burn; and that when proper fuel is administered to it, it is contrary to the nature of fire not to consume it. Therefore, if I see three men taken off the street, in their common wearing apparel, and without any preparation cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and that the flame was so fierce, that it burnt up those men that threw them in; and yet that those who were thrown in, should walk up and down in the bottom of the furnace, and I should see a fourth person with them of glorious appearance like the Son of God; and that these men should come up again out of the furnace without any harm, or so much as the smell of fire upon themselves, or their clothes, I could not be deceived in thinking that there was a stop put to the nature of fire, as to these men; and that it had its effect upon the men whom it burnt at the same time.

Again, though I cannot tell how wonderful and sudden an increase of corn might be produced by the concurrence of many causes, as a warm climate, the fertility of the soil, &c.; yet this I can certainly know, that there is not that natural force in the breath

of two or three words spoken to multiply one small loaf of bread so fast, in the breaking of it, as truly and really, not only in appearance and show to the eye, but to fill the bellies of several thousand hungry persons; and that the fragments should be much more than the bread was at first.

So neither in a word spoken, to raise the dead, cure diseases, &c.

Therefore, though we know not the utmost extent of the power of nature; yet we can certainly know what is contrary to the nature of several such things as we do know.

And therefore, though we may be cheated and imposed upon in many seeming miracles and wonders, yet there are some things wherein we may be certain.

But farther, the deists acknowledge a God, of an almighty power, who made all things; yet they would put it out of his power to make any revelation of his will to mankind. For if we cannot be certain of any miracle, how should we know when God sent any thing extraordinary to us?

Nay, how should we know the ordinary power of nature, if we know not what exceeded it? If we know not what is natural, how do we know there is such a thing as nature? That all is not supernatural, all miracles, and so disputable, till we come to downright scepticism, and doubt the certainty of our outward senses, whether we see, hear, or feel; or all be not a miraculous illusion!

Which, because I know the deists are not inclined to do, therefore I will return to pursue my argument upon the conviction of our outward senses, desiring only this, that they would allow the senses of other men to be as certain as their own. Which they cannot refuse, since without this, they can have no certainty of their own.

X. Therefore, from what has been said, the cause is summed up shortly in this, that though we cannot see what was done before our time, yet by the marks which I have laid down concerning the certainty of matters of fact done before our time, we may be as much assured of the truth of them, as if we saw them with our eyes; because whatever matter of fact has all the four marks before mentioned, could never have been invented and received, but upon the conviction of the outward senses of all those who did receive it, as before is demonstrated. And therefore the topic which I have chosen does stand upon the conviction even of men's outward senses. And since you have confined me to one topic, I have not insisted upon the other, which I have only named.

XI. And it now lies upon the deists, if they would appear as men of reason, to show some matter of fact of former ages, which they allow to be true, that has greater evidence of its truth, than the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ: otherwise they cannot, with any show of reason, reject the one, and yet admit of the other.

But I have given them greater latitude than this; for I have shown such marks of the truth of the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, as no other matters of fact of those times, however true, have, but these only: and I put it upon them to show any forgery that has all these marks.

This is a short issue. Keep them close to this. This determines the cause all at once.

Let them produce their Apollonius Tyanæus, whose life was put into English by the execrable Charles Blount,\* and compared with all the wit and malice he was master of, to the life and miracles of our blessed Saviour. Let them take aid from all the legends of the church of Rome, those pious cheats, the sorest disgraces in Christianity; and which have bid the fairest of any one contrivance to overturn the certainty of the miracles of Christ, and his apostles, and the whole truth of the gospel, by putting them all upon the same foot; at least, they are so understood by the generality of their devotees, though disowned and laughed at by the learned, and men of sense among them.

Let them pick and choose the most probable of all the fables of the heathen deities, and see if they can find in any of these, the four marks before mentioned.

Otherwise let them submit to the irrefragable certainty of the Christian religion.

XII. But if, notwithstanding all that is said, the deists will still contend, that all this is but priestcraft, the invention of priests, for their own profit, &c., then they will give us an idea of priests, far different from what they intend: for then, we must look upon these priests, not only as the cunningest and wisest of mankind, but we shall be tempted to adore them as deities, who have such power, as to impose, at their pleasure, upon the senses of mankind, to make them believe, that they had practised such public institutions, enacted them by laws, taught them to their children, &c., when they had never done any of these things, or even so much as heard of them before: and then, upon the credit of their believing that they had done such things as they never did, to make them farther believe, upon the same foundation, whatever they pleased to impose upon them, as to former ages: I say, such a power as this, must exceed all that is human; and consequently, make us rank these priests far above the condition of mortals.

2. Nay, this were to make them outdo all that has ever been related of the infernal powers; for though their legerdemain had extended to deceive some unwary beholders; and their power of working some seeming miracles has been great, yet it never reached,

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\* The hand of that scorner, which durst write such outrageous blasphemy against his Maker, the divine vengeance has made his own executioner. This I would not have mentioned, (because the like judgment has befallen others,) but that the *Theistical Club* have set this up as a principle; and printed a vindication of this same Blount for murdering himself, by way of justification of self-murder. Which some of them have since, as well as formerly, horribly practised upon themselves. Therefore this is no common judgment to which they are delivered, but a visible mark set upon them, to show how far God has forsaken them; and as a caution to all Christians, to beware of them, and not to come near the tents of these wicked men, lest they perish in their destruction, both of soul and body.

or ever was supposed to reach so far, as to deceive the senses of all mankind in matters of such public and notorious nature as those of which we now speak, to make them believe, that they had enacted laws for such public observances, continually practised them, taught them to their children, and had been instructed in them themselves from their childhood, if they had never enacted, practised, taught, or been taught such things.

3. And as this exceeds all the power of hell and devils, so is it more than ever God Almighty has done since the foundation of the world. None of the miracles that he has shown, or belief which he has required to any thing that he has revealed, has ever contradicted the outward senses of any one man in the world, much less of all mankind together. For miracles being appeals to our outward senses, if they should overthrow the certainty of our outward senses, must destroy, with it, all their own certainty as to us; since we have no other way to judge of a miracle exhibited to our senses, than upon the supposition of the certainty of our senses, upon which we give credit to a miracle that is shown to our senses.

4. This, by the way, is a yet unanswered argument against the miracle of transubstantiation, and shows the weakness of the defence which the church of Rome offers for it, (from whom the Socinians have licked it up, and of late, have gloried much in it among us,) that the doctrines of the trinity or incarnation contain as great seeming absurdities as that of transubstantiation: For I would ask, which of our senses it is which the doctrines of the trinity or incarnation do contradict? Is it our seeing, hearing, feeling, taste, or smell? whereas transubstantiation does contradict all of these. Therefore the comparison is exceeding short, and out of purpose. But to return.

If the Christian religion be a cheat, and nothing else but the invention of priests, and carried on by their craft, it makes their power and wisdom greater than that of men, angels, or devils; and more than God himself ever yet showed or expressed, to deceive and impose upon the senses of mankind, in such public and notorious matters of fact.

XIII. And this miracle, which the deists must run into to avoid these recorded of Moses and Christ, is much greater, and more astonishing, than all the Scriptures tell of them.

So that these men who laugh at all miracles, are now obliged to account for the greatest of all, how the senses of mankind could be imposed upon in such public matters of fact.

And how then can they make the priests the most contemptible of all mankind, since they make them the sole authors of this the greatest of miracles?

XIV. And since the deists (these men of sense and reason) have so vile and mean an idea of the priests of all religions, why do they not recover the world out of the possession and government of such blockheads? Why do they suffer kings and states to be led by them; to establish their deceits by laws, and inflict penalties upon the opposers of them? Let the deists try their hands; they have been

trying, and are now busy about it. And free liberty they have. Yet they have not prevailed, nor ever yet did prevail in any civilized or generous nation. And though they have some inroads among the Hottentots, and some other the most brutal part of mankind, yet are they still exploded, and priests have and do prevail against them, among not only the greatest, but best part of the world, and the most glorious for arts, learning, and war.

XV. For as the devil does ape God, in his institutions of religion, his feasts and sacrifices, &c., so likewise in his priests, without whom, no religion, whether true or false, can stand. False religion is but a corruption of the true. The true was before it, though it be followed close upon the heels.

The revelation made to Moses is older than any history extant in the heathen world. The heathens, in imitation of him, pretended likewise to their revelations; but I have given those marks which distinguish them from the true: none of them have those four marks before mentioned.

Now the deists think all revelations to be equally pretended and a cheat; and the priests of all religions to be the same contrivers and jugglers; and therefore they proclaim war equally against all, and are equally engaged to bear the brunt of all.

And if the contest be only between the deists and the priests, which of them are the men of the greatest parts and sense, let the effects determine it; and let the deists yield the victory to their conquerors, who by their own confession carry all the world before them.

XVI. If the deists say, that this is because all the world are block-heads, as well as those priests who govern them; that all are block-heads except the deists, who vote themselves only to be men of sense: this (besides the modesty of it) will spoil their great and beloved topic, in behalf of what they call natural religion, against the revealed, viz. appealing to the common reason of mankind. This they set up against revelation; think this to be sufficient for all the uses of men, here or hereafter, (if there be any after state,) and therefore that there is no use of revelation; this common reason they advance as infallible, at least, as the surest guide, yet now cry out upon it, when it turns against them; when this common reason runs after revelation, (as it always has done,) then common reason is a beast, and we must look for reason, not from the common sentiments of mankind, but only among the beaux, the deists.

XVII. Therefore if the deists would avoid the mortification (which would be very uneasy to them) to yield and submit to be subdued and hewed down before the priests, whom of all mankind they hate and despise; if they would avoid this, let them confess as the truth is, That religion is no invention of priests, but of divine original: that priests were instituted by the same author of religion; and that their order is a perpetual and living monument of the matters of fact of their religion, instituted from the time that such matters of fact were said to be done, as the Levites from Moses; the apostles, and succeeding clergy, from Christ, to this day. That no hea-

then priests can say the same: they were not appointed by the gods whom they served, but by others in after ages: they cannot stand the test of the four rules before mentioned, which the Christian priests can do, and they only. Now the Christian priesthood, as instituted by Christ himself, and continued by succession to this day, being as impregnable and flagrant a testimony to the truth of the matters of fact of Christ, as the sacraments, or any other public institutions: besides that, if the priesthood were taken away, the sacraments, and other public institutions, which are administered by their hands, must fall with them: therefore the devil has been most busy, and bent his greatest force, in all ages, against the priesthood, knowing, that if that goes down, all goes with it.

XVIII. And now, last of all, if one word of advice would not be lost upon men who think so unmeasurably of themselves, as the deists, you may represent to them, what a condition they are in, who spend that life and sense, which God has given them, in ridiculing the greatest of his blessings, his revelations of Christ, and by Christ, to redeem those from eternal misery, who shall believe in him and obey his laws. And that God, in his wonderful mercy and wisdom, has so guarded his revelations, as that it is past the power of men or devils to counterfeit; and that there is no denying of them, unless we will be so absurd, as to deny not only the reason, but the certainty of the outward senses, not only of one, or two, or three, but of mankind in general. That this case is so very plain, that nothing but want of thought can hinder any to discover it. That they must yield it to be so plain, unless they can show some forgery, which has all the four marks before set down. But if they cannot do this, they must quit their cause, and yield a happy victory over themselves; or else sit down under all that ignominy, with which they have loaded the priests, of being, not only the most pernicious, but (what will gall them more) the most inconsiderate, and inconsiderable of mankind.

Therefore, let them not think it an undervaluing of their worthiness, that their whole cause is comprised within so narrow a compass: and no more time bestowed upon it than it is worth.

But let them, rather, reflect, how far they have been all this time from Christianity; whose rudiments they are yet to learn! How far from the way of salvation! How far the race of their lives is run, before they have set one step in the road to heaven. And therefore how much diligence they ought to use, to redeem all that time they have lost, lest they lose themselves for ever, and be convinced, by a dreadful experience, when it is too late, that the Gospel is a truth, and of the last consequence.

THE END.

THE

*James H. H. H. H.*

EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

BY

ALEXANDER, WATSON,  
JENYNS, LESLIE, AND PALEY.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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PUBLISHED BY

James Kay, Jun. & Co., 4 Minor Street, Philadelphia.

John I. Kay & Co., 51 Market Street, Pittsburgh.

*Stereotype Edition.*



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Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1831, by JAMES KAY, Jun. & Co. in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States in and for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

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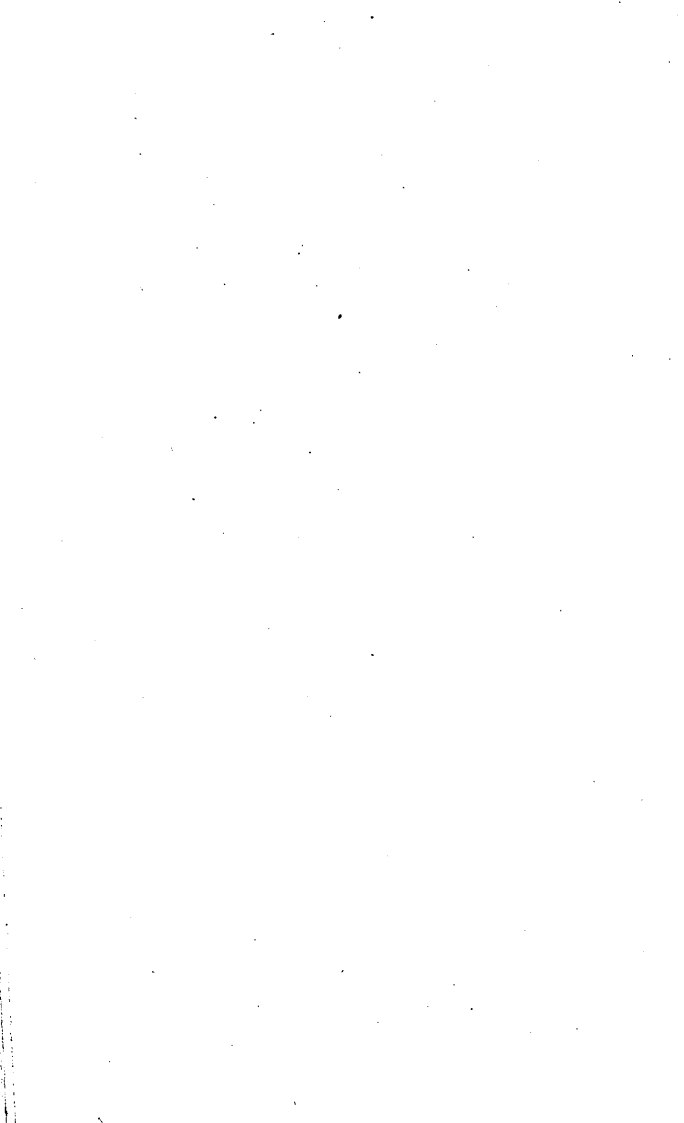
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**PUBLISHED BY**

**James Kay, Jun. & Co., 4 Minor Street, Philadelphia.**

**John I. Kay & Co., 51 Market Street, Pittsburgh.**

*Stereotype Edition.*



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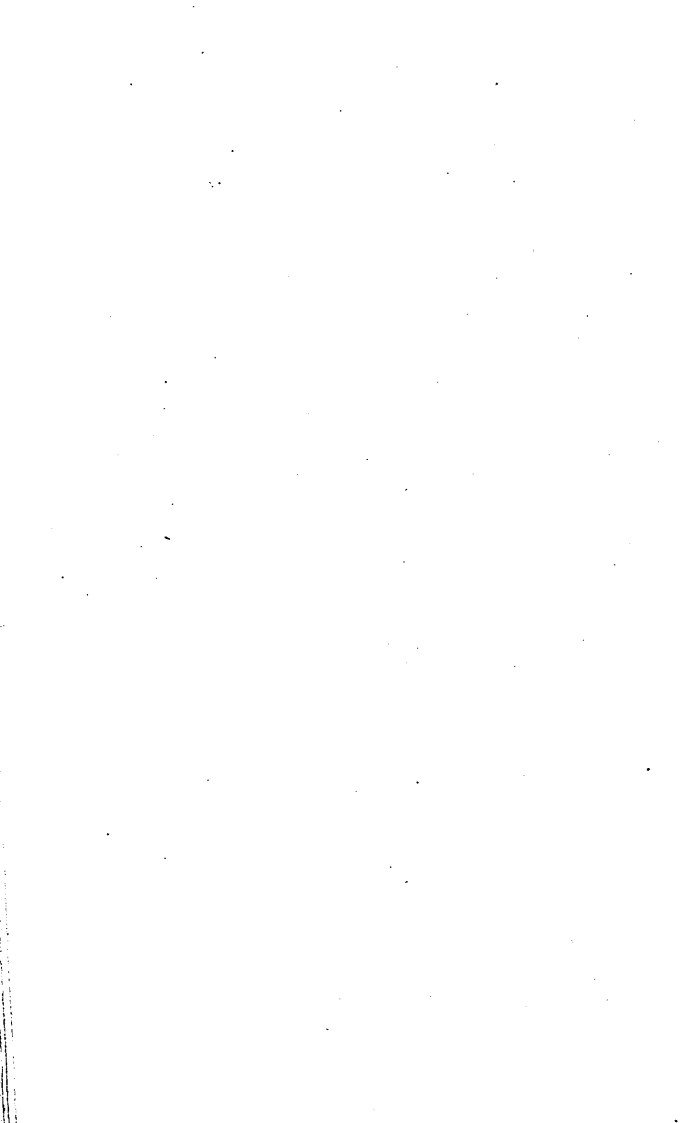
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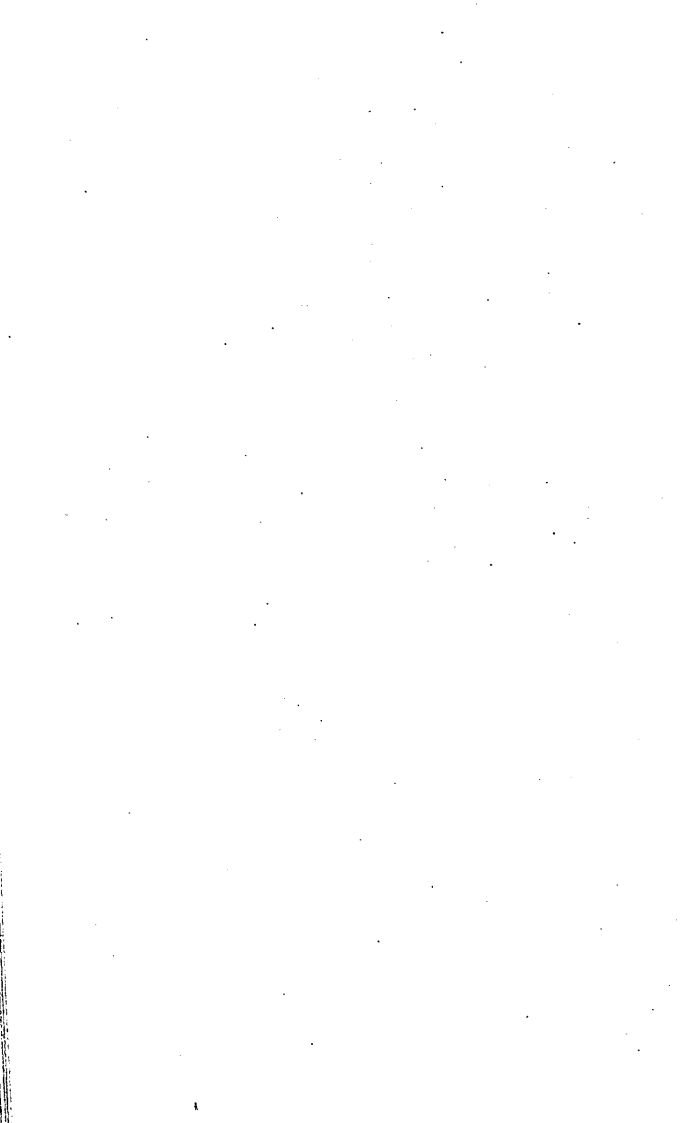
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**OF**  
**THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY**  
**IN THREE PARTS.**  
**BY**  
**WILLIAM PALEY, D. D.**  
**ARCHDEACON OF CARLISLE.**



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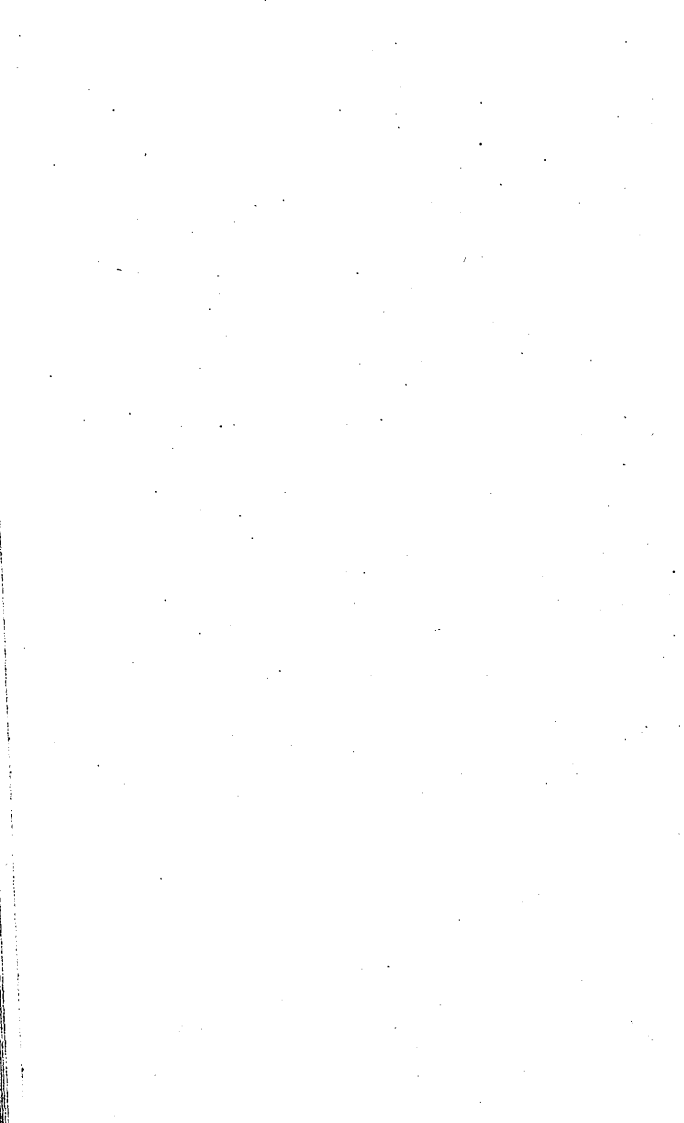
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# A VIEW

OF

## THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

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### PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS.

I DEEM it unnecessary to prove, that mankind stood in need of a revelation, because I have met with no serious person who thinks that, even under the Christian revelation, we have too much light, or any degree of assurance, which is superfluous. I desire, moreover, that in judging of Christianity, it may be remembered, that the question lies between this religion and none: for if the Christian religion be not credible, no one, with whom we have to do, will support the pretensions of any other.

Suppose, then, the world we live in to have had a Creator; suppose it to appear, from the predominant aim and tendency of the provisions and contrivances observable in the universe, that the Deity, when he formed it, consulted for the happiness of his sensitive creation; suppose the disposition which dictated this counsel to continue; suppose a part of the creation to have received faculties from their Maker, by which they are capable of rendering a moral obedience to his will, and of voluntarily pursuing any end for which he has designed them; suppose the Creator to intend for these, his rational and accountable agents, a second state of existence, in which their situation will be regulated by their behavior in the first state, by which supposition (and by no other) the objection to the divine government in not putting a difference between the good and the bad, and the inconsistency of this confusion with the care and benevolence discoverable in the works of the Deity, is done away; suppose it to be of the utmost importance to the subjects of this dispensation to know what is intended for them; that is, suppose the knowledge of it to be highly conducive to the happiness of the species, a purpose which so many provisions of nature are calculated to promote; suppose, nevertheless, almost the whole race, either by the imperfection of their faculties, the misfortune of their situation, or by the loss of some prior revelation, to want this knowledge, and not to be likely without the aid of a new revelation to attain it:—under these circumstances, is it improbable that a revelation should be made? is it incredible that God should interpose for such a purpose? Suppose him to design for mankind a future state; is it unlikely that he should acquaint him with it?

*Of the antecedent Credibility of Miracles.*

Now in what way can a revelation be made but by miracles? In none which we are able to conceive. Consequently in whatever degree it is probable, or not very improbable, that a revelation should be communicated to mankind at all; in the same degree is it probable, or not very improbable, that miracles should be wrought. Therefore when miracles are related to have been wrought in the promulgating of a revelation manifestly wanted, and, if true, of inestimable value, the improbability which arises from the miraculous nature of the things related, is no greater than the original improbability that such a revelation should be imparted by God.

I wish it however to be correctly understood, in what manner, and to what extent, this argument is alleged. We do not assume the attributes of the Deity, or the existence of a future state, in order to *prove* the reality of miracles. The reality always must be proved by evidence. We assert only that in miracles adduced in support of revelation, there is not any such antecedent improbability as no testimony can surmount. And for the purpose of maintaining this assertion, we contend that the incredibility of miracles related to have been wrought in attestation of a message from God, conveying intelligence of a future state of rewards and punishments, and teaching mankind how to prepare themselves for that state, is not in itself greater than the event, call it either probable or improbable, of the two following propositions being true: namely, first, that a future state of existence should be destined by God for his human creation; and, secondly, that being so destined, he should acquaint them with it. It is not necessary for our purpose, that these propositions be capable of proof, or even that by arguments drawn from the light of nature, they can be made out to be probable; it is enough that we are able to say concerning them, that they are not so violently improbable, so contradictory to what we already believe of the divine power and character, that either the propositions themselves, or facts strictly connected with the propositions (and therefore no farther improbable than they are improbable), ought to be rejected at first sight, and to be rejected by whatever strength or complication of evidence they be attested.

This is the prejudication we would resist. For to this length does a modern objection to miracles go, viz. that no human testimony can in any case render them credible. I think the reflection above stated, that if there be a revelation, there must be miracles, and that under the circumstances in which the human species are placed, a revelation is not improbable, or not improbable in any great degree, to be a fair answer to the whole objection.

But since it is an objection which stands in the very threshold of our argument, and, if admitted, is a bar to every proof, and to all future reasoning upon the subject, it may be necessary, before we proceed farther, to examine the principle upon which it professes to be founded; which principle is concisely this, That it is contrary to

experience that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false.

Now there appears a small ambiguity in the term 'experience,' and in the phrases 'contrary to experience,' or 'contradicting experience,' which it may be necessary to remove in the first place. Strictly speaking, the narrative of a fact is *then* only contrary to experience, when the fact is related to have existed at a time and place, at which time and place we being present did not perceive it to exist; as if it should be asserted that, in a particular room, and at a particular hour of a certain day, a man was raised from the dead, in which room, and at the time specified, we being present, and looking on, perceived no such event to have taken place. Here the assertion is contrary to experience, properly so called: and this is a contrariety which no evidence can surmount. It matters nothing whether the fact be of a miraculous nature or not. But although this be the experience and the contrariety, which archbishop Tillotson alleged in the quotation with which Mr. Hume opens his essay, it is certainly not that experience, nor that contrariety, which Mr. Hume himself intended to object. And short of this, I know no intelligible signification which can be affixed to the term 'contrary to experience,' but one, viz. that of not having ourselves experienced any thing similar to the thing related, or such things not being generally experienced by others. I say 'not generally:' for to state concerning the fact in question, that no such thing was *ever* experienced, or that *universal* experience is against it, is to assume the subject of the controversy.

Now the improbability which arises from the want (for this properly is a want, not a contradiction) of experience, is only equal to the probability there is that, if the thing were true, we should experience things similar to it, or that such things would be generally experienced. Suppose it then to be true that miracles were wrought on the first promulgation of Christianity, when nothing but miracles could decide its authority, is it certain that such miracles could be repeated so often, and in so many places, as to become objects of general experience? Is it a probability approaching to certainty? is it a probability of any great strength or force? is it such as no evidence can encounter? And yet this probability is the exact *converse*, and therefore the exact measure, of the improbability which arises from the want of experience, and which Mr. Hume represents as invincible by human testimony.

It is not like alleging a new law of nature, or a new experiment in natural philosophy; because when these are related, it is expected that under the same circumstances, the same effect will follow universally; and in proportion as this expectation is justly entertained, the want of a corresponding experience negatives the history. But to expect concerning a miracle, that it should succeed upon a repetition, is to expect that which would make it cease to be a miracle, which is contrary to its nature as such, and would totally destroy the use and purpose for which it was wrought.

The force of experience, as an objection to miracles, is founded

in the presumption, either that the course of nature is invariable, or that if it be ever varied, variations will be frequent and general. Has the necessity of this alternative been demonstrated? Permit us to call the course of nature the agency of an intelligent Being; and is there any good reason for judging this state of the case to be probable? Ought we not rather to expect that such a Being, on occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed, yet that such occasions should return seldom; that these interruptions consequently should be confined to the experience of a few; that the want of it, therefore, in many, should be matter neither of surprise nor objection.

But as a continuation of the argument from experience, it is said that when we advance accounts of miracles, we assign effects without causes, or we attribute effects to causes inadequate to the purpose, or to causes of the operation of which we have no experience. Of what causes, we may ask, and of what effects does the objection speak? If it be answered, that when we ascribe the cure of the palsy to a touch, of blindness to the anointing of the eyes with clay, or the raising of the dead to a word, we lay ourselves open to this imputation; we reply that we ascribe no such effects to such causes. We perceive no virtue or energy in these things more than in other things of the same kind. They are merely signs to connect the miracle with its end. The effect we ascribe simply to the volition of the Deity; of whose existence and power, not to say of whose presence and agency, we have previous and independent proof. We have therefore all we seek for in the works of rational agents,—a sufficient power and an adequate motive. In a word, once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible.

Mr. Hume states the case of miracles to be a contest of opposite improbabilities; that is to say, a question whether it be more improbable that the miracle should be true, or the testimony false: and this I think a fair account of the controversy. But herein I remark a want of argumentative justice, that, in describing the improbability of miracles, he suppresses all those circumstances of extenuation which result from our knowledge of the existence, power, and disposition of the Deity; his concern in the creation, the end answered by the miracle, the importance of that end, and its subserviency to the plan pursued in the work of nature. As Mr. Hume has represented the question, miracles are alike incredible to him who is previously assured of the constant agency of a Divine Being, and to him who believes that no such Being exists in the universe. They are equally incredible, whether related to have been wrought upon occasions the most deserving, and for purposes the most beneficial, or for no assignable end whatever, or for an end confessedly trifling or pernicious. This surely cannot be a correct statement. In adjusting also the other side of the balance, the strength and weight of testimony, this author has provided an answer to every possible accumulation of historical proof, by telling us, that we are not obliged to explain how the story of the evidence arose.

Now I think that we *are* obliged ; not, perhaps, to show by positive accounts how it did, but by a probable hypothesis how it might, so happen. The existence of the testimony is a phenomenon ; the truth of the fact solves the phenomenon. If we reject this solution, we ought to have some other to rest in ; and none, even by our adversaries, can be admitted, which is not inconsistent with the principles that regulate human affairs and human conduct at present, or which makes men *then* to have been a different kind of beings from what they are now.

But the short consideration which, independently of every other, convinces me that there is no solid foundation in Mr. Hume's conclusion, is the following. When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician, the first thing he does with it is to try it upon a simple case, and if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume's theorem. If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived ; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumor of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet ; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case ; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect ; if it was at last executed ; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account ; still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say, that there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity.

Instances of spurious miracles, supported by strong apparent testimony, undoubtedly demand examination ; Mr. Hume has endeavored to fortify his argument by some examples of this kind. I hope in a proper place to show, that none of them reach the strength or circumstances of the Christian evidence. In these, however, consists the weight of his objection : in the principle itself, I am persuaded, there is none.

---

## PART I.

### OF THE DIRECT HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY, AND WHEREIN IT IS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE EVIDENCE ALLEGED FOR OTHER MIRACLES.

THE two propositions which I shall endeavor to establish are these :

I. That there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in



labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.

II. That there is *not* satisfactory evidence, that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain as these are, have ever acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in consequence of their belief of these accounts.

The first of these propositions, as it forms the argument, will stand at the head of the following *nine* chapters.

### PROPOSITION I.

*'There is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses to the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.'*

### CHAP. I.

*Evidence of the Sufferings of the First Propagators of Christianity, from the nature of the case.*

To support this proposition, two points are necessary to be made out: first, that the Founder of the institution, his associates and immediate followers, acted the part which the proposition imputes to them: secondly, that they did so in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our Scriptures, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of this history.

Before we produce any particular testimony to the activity and sufferings which compose the subject of our first assertion, it will be proper to consider the degree of probability which the assertion derives from the *nature of the case*, that is, by inferences from those parts of the case which, in point of fact, are on all hands acknowledged.

First, then, the Christian religion exists, and therefore by some means or other was established. Now it either owes the principle of its establishment, *i. e.* its first publication, to the activity of the Person who was the founder of the institution, and of those who were joined with him in the undertaking, or we are driven upon the strange supposition, that, although they might lie by, others would take it up; although they were quiet and silent, other persons busied themselves in the success and propagation of their story. This is perfectly incredible. To me it appears little less than certain, that, if the first announcing of the religion by the Founder had not been followed up by the zeal and industry of his immediate disciples, the attempt must have expired in its birth. Then as to the kind and degree of exertion which was employed

and the mode of life to which these persons submitted, we reasonably suppose it to be like that which we observe in all others who voluntarily become missionaries of a new faith. Frequent, earnest and laborious preaching, constantly conversing with religious persons upon religion, a sequestration from the common pleasures, engagements, and varieties of life, and an addiction to one serious object, compose the habits of such men. I do not say that this mode of life is without enjoyment, but I say that the enjoyment springs from sincerity. With a consciousness at the bottom of hollowness and falsehood, the fatigue and restraint would become insupportable. I am apt to believe that very few hypocrites engage in these undertakings; or, however, persist in them long. Ordinarily speaking, nothing can overcome the indolence of mankind, the love which is natural to most tempers of cheerful society and cheerful scenes, or the desire which is common to all, of personal ease and freedom, but conviction.

Secondly, it is also highly probable, from the nature of the case, that the propagation of the new religion was attended with difficulty and danger. As addressed to the Jews, it was a system adverse not only to their habitual opinions, but to those opinions upon which their hopes, their partialities, their pride, their consolation, was founded. This people, with or without reason, had worked themselves into a persuasion, that some signal and greatly advantageous change was to be effected in the condition of their country, by the agency of a long-promised messenger from heaven.\* The rulers of the Jews, their leading sect, their priesthood, had been the authors of this persuasion to the common people; so that it was not merely the conjecture of theoretical divines, or the secret expectation of a few recluse devotees, but it was become the popular hope and passion, and like all popular opinions, undoubting, and impatient of contradiction. They clung to this hope under every misfortune of their country, and with more tenacity as their dangers or calamities increased. To find, therefore, that expectations so gratifying were to be worse than disappointed; that they were to end in the diffusion of a mild unambitious religion, which, instead of victories and triumphs, instead of exalting their nation and institution above the rest of the world, was to advance those whom they despised to an equality with themselves, in those very points of comparison in which they most valued their own distinction, could be no very pleasing discovery to a Jewish mind; nor could the messengers of such intelligence expect to be well received or easily credited. The doctrine was equally harsh and novel. The extending of the kingdom of God to those who did not conform to the law of Moses, was a notion that had never before entered into the thoughts of a Jew.

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\* *Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judæa profecti rerum potirentur.*—Sueton. *Vespasian*. cap. 4—8.

\* *Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judæa rerum potirentur.*—Tacit. *Hist. lib. v. cap. 9—13.*

The character of the new institution was, in other respects also, ungrateful to Jewish habits and principles. Their own religion was in a high degree technical. Even the enlightened Jew placed a great deal of stress upon the ceremonies of his law, saw in them a great deal of virtue and efficacy; the gross and vulgar had scarcely any thing else; and the hypocritical and ostentatious magnified them above measure, as being the instruments of their own reputation and influence. The Christian scheme, without formally repealing the Levitical code, lowered its estimation extremely. In the place of strictness and zeal in performing the observances which that code prescribed, or which tradition had added to it, the new sect preached up faith, well-regulated affections, inward purity, and moral rectitude of disposition, as the true ground, on the part of the worshipper, of merit and acceptance with God. This, however rational it may appear, or recommending to us at present, did not by any means facilitate the plan then. On the contrary, to disparage those qualities which the highest characters in the country valued themselves most upon, was a sure way of making powerful enemies. As if the frustration of the national hope was not enough, the long-esteemed merit of ritual zeal and punctuality was to be decried, and that by Jews preaching to Jews.

The ruling party at Jerusalem had just before crucified the Founder of the religion. That is a fact which will not be disputed. They, therefore, who stood forth to preach the religion, must necessarily reproach these rulers with an execution, which they could not but represent as an unjust and cruel murder. This would not render their office more easy, or their situation more safe.

With regard to the interference of the Roman government which was then established in Judea, I should not expect, that, despising as it did the religion of the country, it would, if left to itself, animadvert, either with much vigilance or much severity, upon the schisms and controversies which arose within it. Yet there was that in Christianity which might easily afford a handle of accusation with a jealous government. The Christians avowed an unqualified obedience to a new master. They avowed also that he was the person who had been foretold to the Jews under the suspected title of King. The spiritual nature of this kingdom, the consistency of this obedience with civil subjections, were distinctions too refined to be entertained by a Roman president, who viewed the business at a great distance, or through the medium of very hostile representations. Our histories accordingly inform us, that this was the turn which the enemies of Jesus gave to his character and pretensions in their remonstrances with Pontius Pilate. And Justin Martyr, about a hundred years afterward, complains that the same mistake prevailed in his time: 'Ye having heard that we are waiting for a kingdom, suppose, without distinguishing, that we mean a human kingdom, when in truth we speak of that which is with God.'\*

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\* Ap. Ima. p. 16. Ed. Thirl.

And it was undoubtedly a natural source of calumny and misconception.

The preachers of Christianity had therefore to contend with prejudice backed by power. They had to come forward to a disappointed people, to a priesthood possessing a considerable share of municipal authority, and actuated by strong motives of opposition and resentment; and they had to do this under a foreign government, to whose favor they made no pretensions, and which was constantly surrounded by their enemies. The well-known, because the experienced fate of reformers, whenever the reformation subverts some reigning opinion, and does not proceed upon a change that has already taken place in the sentiments of a country, will not allow, much less lead us to suppose, that the first propagators of Christianity at Jerusalem, and in Judea, under the difficulties and the enemies they had to contend with, and entirely destitute as they were of force, authority, or protection, could execute their mission with personal ease and safety.

Let us next inquire, what might reasonably be expected by the preachers of Christianity, when they turned themselves to the heathen public. Now the first thing that strikes us is, that the religion they carried with them was *exclusive*. It denied without reserve the truth of every article of heathen mythology, the existence of every object of their worship. It accepted no compromise; it admitted no comprehension. It must prevail, if it prevailed at all, by the overthrow of every statue, altar, and temple, in the world. It will not easily be credited, that a design, so bold as this was, could in any age be attempted to be carried into execution with impunity.

For it ought to be considered, that this was not setting forth, or magnifying the character and worship of some new competitor for a place in the Pantheon, whose pretensions might be discussed or asserted without questioning the reality of any others; it was pronouncing all other gods to be false, and all other worship vain. From the facility with which the polytheism of ancient nations admitted new objects of worship into the number of their acknowledged divinities, or the patience with which they might entertain proposals of this kind, we can argue nothing as to their toleration of a system, or of the publishers and active propagators of a system, which swept away the very foundation of the existing establishment. The one was nothing more than what it would be, in popish countries, to add a saint to the calendar; the other was to abolish and tread under foot the calendar itself.

Secondly, it ought also to be considered, that this was not the case of philosophers propounding in their books, or in their schools, doubts concerning the truth of the popular creed, or even avowing their disbelief of it. These philosophers did not go about from place to place to collect proselytes from amongst the common people; to form in the heart of the country societies professing their tenets; to provide for the order, instruction, and permanency of these societies; nor did they enjoin their followers to withdraw themselves

from the public worship of the temples,\* or refuse a compliance with rites instituted by the laws. These things are what the Christians did, and what the philosophers did not; and in these consisted the activity and danger of the enterprise.

Thirdly, it ought also to be considered, that this danger proceeded not merely from solemn acts and public resolutions of the state, but from sudden bursts of violence at particular places, from the license of the populace, the rashness of some magistrates, and negligence of others; from the influence and instigation of interested adversaries, and in general, from the variety and warmth of opinion which an errand so novel and extraordinary could not fail of exciting. I can conceive that the teachers of Christianity might both fear and suffer much from these causes, without any general persecution being denounced against them by imperial authority. Some length of time, I should suppose, might pass, before the vast machine of the Roman empire would be put in motion, or its attention be obtained to religious controversy: but, during that time, a great deal of ill usage might be endured, by a set of friendless, unprotected travellers, telling men, wherever they came, that the religion of their ancestors, the religion in which they had been brought up, the religion of the state, and of the magistrate, the rites which they frequented, the pomp which they admired, was throughout a system of folly and delusion.

L Nor do I think that the teachers of Christianity would find protection in that general disbelief of the popular theology, which is supposed to have prevailed amongst the intelligent part of the heathen public. It is by no means true that unbelievers are usually tolerant. They are not disposed (and why should they?) to endanger the present state of things, by suffering a religion of which they believe nothing, to be disturbed by another of which they believe as little. They are ready themselves to conform to any thing; and are, oftentimes, amongst the foremost to procure conformity from others, by any method which they think likely to be efficacious. When was ever a change of religion patronized by infidels? How little, notwithstanding the reigning scepticism, and the magnified liberality of that age, the true principles of toleration were understood by the wisest men amongst them, may be gathered from two eminent and uncontested examples. The younger Pliny, polished as he was by all the literature of that soft and elegant period, could gravely pronounce this monstrous judgment;—‘Those who persisted in declaring themselves Christians, I ordered to be led away to punishment (i. e. to execution), for I DID NOT DOUBT, *whatever it was that they confessed, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be*

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\* The best of the ancient philosophers, Plato, Cicero, and Epictetus, allowed, or rather enjoined, men to worship the gods of the country, and in the established form. See passages to this purpose, collected from their works, by Dr. Clarke, Nat. and Rev. Rel. p. 180. ed. 5.—Except Socrates, they all thought it wiser to comply with the laws than to contend.

*punished.* His master, Trajan, a mild and accomplished prince, went, nevertheless, no further in his sentiments of moderation and equity, than what appears in the following rescript: 'The Christians are not to be sought for: but if any are brought before you, and convicted, they are to be punished.' And this direction he gives, after it had been reported to him by his own president, that, by the most strict examination nothing could be discovered in the principles of these persons, but 'a bad and excessive superstition,' accompanied, it seems, with an oath or mutual federation, 'to allow themselves in no crime, or immoral conduct whatever.' The truth is, the ancient heathens considered religion entirely as an affair of state; as much under the tuition of the magistrate, as any other part of the police. The religion of that age was not merely allied to the state; it was incorporated into it. Many of its offices were administered by the magistrate. Its titles of pontiffs, augurs, and flamens, were borne by senators, consuls, and generals. Without discussing, therefore, the truth of theology, they resented every affront put upon the established worship, as a direct opposition to the authority of government.

Add to which, that the religious systems of those times, however ill supported by evidence, had been long established. The *ancient* religion of a country has always many votaries, and sometimes not the fewer, because its origin is hidden in remoteness and obscurity. Men have a natural veneration for antiquity, especially in matters of religion. What Tacitus says of the Jewish, was more applicable to the heathen establishment; 'Hi ritus, quoquo modo inducti, antiquitate defenduntur.' It was also a splendid and sumptuous worship. It had its priesthood, its endowments, its temples. Statuary, painting, architecture, and music, contributed their effect to its ornament and magnificence. It abounded in festival shows and solemnities, to which the common people are greatly addicted, and which were of a nature to engage them much more than any thing of that sort among us. These things would retain great numbers on its side by the fascination of spectacle and pomp, as well as interest many in its preservation by the advantage which they drew from it. 'It was moreover interwoven,' as Mr. Gibbon rightly represents it, 'with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or private life, with all the offices and amusements of society.' On the due celebration also of its rites, the people were taught to believe, and did believe, that the prosperity of their country in a great measure depended.

I am willing to accept the account of the matter which is given by Mr. Gibbon: 'The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false, and by the magistrate as equally useful:' and I would ask from which of these three classes of men were the Christian missionaries to look for protection or impunity? Could they expect it from the people, 'whose acknowledged confidence in the public religion' they subverted from its founda-

tion? From the philosopher, who, 'considering all religions as equally false,' would of course rank theirs among the number, with the addition of regarding them as busy and troublesome zealots? Or from the magistrate, who, satisfied with the 'utility' of the subsisting religion, would not be likely to countenance a spirit of proselytism and innovation;—a system which declared war against every other, and which, if it prevailed, must end in a total rupture of public opinion; an upstart religion, in a word, which was not content with its own authority, but must disgrace all the settled religions in the world? It was not to be imagined that he would endure with patience, that the religion of the emperor and of the state should be calumniated and borne down by a company of superstitious and despicable Jews.

Lastly, the *nature of the case* affords a strong proof, that the original teachers of Christianity, in consequence of their new profession, entered upon a new and singular course of life. We may be allowed to presume, that the institution which they preached to others, they conformed to in their own persons; because this is no more than what every teacher of a new religion both does, and must do, in order to obtain either proselytes or hearers. The change which this would produce was very considerable. It is a change which we do not easily estimate, because, ourselves and all about us being habituated to the institution from our infancy, it is what we neither experience nor observe. After men became Christians, much of their time was spent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the eucharist, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in an affectionate intercourse with other societies. Perhaps their mode of life, in its form and habit, was not very unlike the *Unitas Fratrum*, or the modern Methodists. Think then what it was to become *such* at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Antioch, or even at Jerusalem. How new! how alien from all their former habits, and ideas, and from those of every body about them! What a revolution there must have been of opinions and prejudices to bring the matter to this!

We know what the precepts of the religion are: how pure, how benevolent, how disinterested a conduct they enjoin; and that this purity and benevolence are extended to the very thoughts and affections. We are not, perhaps, at liberty to take for granted that the lives of the preachers of Christianity were as perfect as their lessons: but we are entitled to contend, that the observable part of their behavior must have agreed in a great measure with the duties which they taught. There was, therefore (which is all that we assert), a course of life pursued by them, different from that which they before led. And this is of great importance. Men are brought to any thing almost sooner than to change their habit of life, especially when the change is either inconvenient, or made against the force of natural inclination, or with the loss of accustomed indulgences. 'It is the most difficult of all things to convert men from vicious habits to virtuous ones, as every one may judge from what

he feels in himself, as well as from what he sees in others.\* It is almost like making men over again.

Left then to myself, and without any more information than a knowledge of the existence of the religion, of the general story upon which it is founded, and that no act of power, force, and authority, was concerned in its first success, I should conclude, from the very nature and exigency of the case, that the Author of the religion during his life, and his immediate disciples after his death, *exerted* themselves in spreading and publishing the institution throughout the country in which it began, and into which it was first carried; that, in the prosecution of this purpose, they underwent the labors and troubles which we observe the propagators of new sects to undergo; that the attempt must necessarily have also been in a high degree dangerous; that, from the subject of the mission, compared with the fixed opinions and prejudices of those to whom the missionaries were to address themselves, they could hardly fail of encountering strong and frequent opposition; that, by the hand of government, as well as from the sudden fury and unbridled license of the people, they would oftentimes experience injurious and cruel treatment; that, at any rate, they must have always had so much to fear for their personal safety, as to have passed their lives in a state of constant peril and anxiety; and, lastly, that their mode of life and conduct, visibly at least, corresponded with the institutions which they delivered, and, so far, was both new and required continual self-denial.

## CHAP. II.

### *Evidence of the Sufferings of the First Propagators of Christianity, from Profane Testimony.*

AFTER thus considering what was *likely* to happen, we are next to inquire how the transaction is represented in the several accounts that have come down to us. And this inquiry is properly preceded by the other, forasmuch as the reception of these accounts may depend in part on the credibility of what they contain.

The obscure and distant view of Christianity, which some of the heathen writers of that age had gained, and which a few passages in their remaining works incidentally discover to us, offers itself to our notice in the first place: because, so far as this evidence goes, it is the concession of adversaries; the source from which it is drawn is unsuspected. Under this head, a quotation from Tacitus, well known to every scholar, must be inserted, as deserving particular attention. The reader will bear in mind that this passage was written about seventy years after Christ's death, and that it relates to transactions which took place about thirty years after that event. Speaking of the fire which happened at Rome in the time

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\* Hartley's Essays on Man, p. 190.



of Nero, and of the suspicions which were entertained that the emperor himself was concerned in causing it, the historian proceeds in his narrative and observations thus:

‘But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the infamous imputation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end, therefore, to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishments, upon a set of people who were holden in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar, *Christians*. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator Pontius Pilate.—This pernicious superstition, thus checked for awhile, broke out again; and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every thing bad upon the earth finds its way, and is practised. Some who confessed their sect, were seized, and afterward, by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery; for some were disguised in the skin of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs; some were crucified; and others were wrapped in pitch shirts,\* and set on fire when the day closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions, and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment; being a spectator of the whole, in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacle from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pited; and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishments, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of a regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man.’

Our concern with this passage at present is only so far as it affords a presumption in support of the proposition which we maintain, concerning the activity and sufferings of the first teachers of Christianity. Now considered in this view, it proves three things: 1st, that the Founder of the institution was put to death; 2dly, that in the same country in which he was put to death, the religion, after a short check, broke out again and spread; that it so spread, as that, within thirty-four years from the Author's death, a very great number of Christians (*ingens eorum multitudo*) were found at Rome. From which fact, the two following inferences may be fairly drawn: first, that if, in the space of thirty-four years from its commencement, the religion had spread throughout Judea, had extended itself to Rome, and there had numbered a great multitude of converts, the original teachers and missionaries of the institution could not have

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\* This is rather a paraphrase, but is justified by what the Scholiast upon Juvenal says; ‘Nero maleficos homines tædâ et papyrô et cerâ supervestiebat, et sic ad ignem admoveri jubebat.’ Lard. Jewish and Heath. Test. vol. i. p. 359.

been *idle* ; secondly, that when the Author of the undertaking was put to death as a malefactor for his attempt, the endeavors of his followers to establish his religion in the same country, amongst the same people, and in the same age, could not but be attended with danger.

Suetonius, a writer contemporary with Tacitus, describing the transactions of the same reign, uses these words : ‘ *Affecti suppliciiis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ et maleficæ.*’\* ‘The Christians, a set of men of a new and mischievous (or magical) superstition, were punished.’

Since it is not mentioned *here* that the burning of the city was the pretence of the punishment of the Christians, or that they were the Christians of Rome who alone suffered, it is probable that Suetonius refers to some more general persecution than the short and occasional one which Tacitus describes.

Juvenal, a writer of the same age with the two former, and intending, it should seem, to commemorate the cruelties exercised under Nero’s government, has the following lines :†

‘Pone Tigellinum, tædâ lucebis in illâ  
Quâ stantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant,  
Et latum mediâ sulcum deducit† arenâ.’

‘Describe Tigellinus (a creature of Nero), and you shall suffer the same punishment with those who stand burning in their own flame and smoke, their head being held up by a stake fixed to their chin, till they make a long stream of blood and melted sulphur on the ground.’

If this passage were considered by itself, the subject of allusion might be doubtful ; but, when connected with the testimony of Suetonius, as to the actual punishment of the Christians by Nero, and with the account given by Tacitus of the *species* of punishment which they were made to undergo, I think it sufficiently probable, that these were the executions to which the poet refers.

These things, as has been already observed, took place within thirty-one years after Christ’s death, that is, according to the course of nature, in the lifetime, probably, of some of the apostles, and certainly in the lifetime of those who were converted by the apostles, or who were converted in their time. If then the Founder of the religion was put to death in the execution of his design ; if the first race of converts to the religion, many of them, suffered the greatest extremities for their profession ; it is hardly credible, that those who came *between* the two, who were companions of the Author of the institution during his life, and the teachers and propagators of the institution after his death, could go about their undertaking with ease and safety.

The testimony of the younger Pliny belongs to a later period ; for although he was contemporary with Tacitus and Suetonius, yet his account does not, like theirs, go back to the transactions of

\* Suet. Nero. cap. 16.

† Sat. i. ver. 155.

† Fornas ‘deducis.’

Nero's reign, but is confined to the affairs of his own time. His celebrated letter to Trajan was written about seventy years after Christ's death; and the information to be drawn from it, so far as it is connected with our argument, relates principally to two points: first, to the *number* of Christians in Bithynia and Pontus, which was so considerable as to induce the governor of these provinces to speak of them in the following terms: 'Multi, omnis ætatis, utriusque sexûs etiam;—neque enim civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam et agros, superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est.' 'There are many of every age and of both sexes;—nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but smaller towns also, and the open country.' Great exertions must have been used by the preachers of Christianity to produce this state of things within this time. Secondly, to a point which has been already noticed, and which I think of importance to be observed, namely, the sufferings to which Christians were exposed, *without* any public persecution being denounced against them by sovereign authority. For, from Pliny's doubt how he was to act, his silence concerning any subsisting law on the subject, his requesting the emperor's rescript, and the emperor, agreeably to his request, propounding a rule for his direction, without reference to any prior rule, it may be inferred, that there was, at that time, no public edict in force against the Christians. Yet from this same epistle of Pliny it appears 'that accusations, trials, and examinations, were, and had been, going on against them in the provinces over which he presided; that schedules were delivered by anonymous informers, containing the names of persons who were suspected of holding or of favoring the religion; that in consequence of these informations, many had been apprehended, of whom some boldly avowed their profession, and died in the cause; others denied that they were Christians; others, acknowledging that they had once been Christian, declared that they had long ceased to be such.' All which demonstrates, that the profession of Christianity was at that time (in that country at least) attended with fear and danger: and yet this took place without any edict from the Roman sovereign, commanding or authorizing the persecution of Christians. This observation is farther confirmed by a rescript of Adrian to Minucius Fundamus, the proconsul of Asia:\* from which rescript it appears that the custom of the people of Asia was to proceed against the Christians with tumult and uproar. This disorderly practice, I say, is recognized in the edict, because the emperor enjoins, that for the future, if the Christians were guilty, they should be legally brought to trial, and not be pursued by importunity and clamor.

Martial wrote a few years before the younger Pliny; and as his manner was, made the sufferings of the Christians the subject of his ridicule.† Nothing, however, could show the notoriety of the

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\* Lard. Heath. Test. vol. ii. p. 110.

† In matutinâ nuper spectatos arenâ  
Macius, imposuit qui sua membra focis,

fact with more certainty than this does. Martial's testimony, as well indeed as Pliny's, goes also to another point, viz. that the deaths of these men were martyrdoms in the strictest sense, that is to say, were so voluntary, that it was in their power, at the time of pronouncing the sentence, to have averted the execution, by consenting to join in heathen sacrifices.

The constancy, and by consequence the sufferings, of the Christians of this period, is also referred to by Epictetus, who imputes their intrepidity to madness, or to a kind of fashion or habit; and about fifty years afterward, by Marcus Aurelius, who ascribes it to obstinacy. 'Is it possible, (Epictetus asks,) that a man may arrive at this temper, and become indifferent to those things, from madness or from habit, *as the Galileans?*'\* 'Let this preparation of the mind (to die) arise from its own judgment, and not from obstinacy *like the Christians.*'†

### CHAP. III.

*Indirect Evidence of the Sufferings of the First Propagators of Christianity, from the Scriptures, and other ancient Christian Writings.*

OF the primitive condition of Christianity, a distant only and general view can be acquired from heathen writers. It is in our own books that the detail and interior of the transaction must be sought for. And this is nothing different from what might be expected. Who would write a history of Christianity, but a Christian? Who was likely to record the travels, sufferings, labors, or successes, of the apostles, but one of their own number, or of their followers? Now these books come up in their accounts to the full extent of the proposition which we maintain. We have four histories of Jesus Christ. We have a history taking up the narrative from his death, and carrying on an account of the propagation of the religion, and of some of the most eminent persons engaged in it, for a space of nearly thirty years. We have, what some may think still more original, a collection of letters, written by certain principal agents in the business, upon the business, and in the midst of their concern and connexion with it. And we have these writings severally attesting the point which we contend for, viz. the sufferings of the witnesses of the history, and attesting it in every variety of form in which it can be conceived to appear: directly and indirectly, expressly and incidentally, by assertion, recital, and allusion, by narra-

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Si patiens fortisque tibi durusque videtur,  
 Abderitanæ pectora plebis habes;  
 Nam cum dicatur, tunicâ præsentē molestâ,  
 Ure|| manum; plus est dicere, Non facio.

\* Epict. l. iv. c. 7.

† Marc. Aur. Med. l. xi. c. 3.

tives of facts, and by arguments and discourses built upon these facts; either referring to them, or necessarily presupposing them.

I remark this variety, because, in examining ancient records, or indeed any species of testimony, it is, in my opinion, of the greatest importance to attend to the information or grounds of argument which are *casually* and *undesignedly* disclosed; forasmuch as this species of proof is, of all others, the least liable to be corrupted by fraud or misrepresentation.

I may be allowed, therefore, in the inquiry which is now before us, to suggest some conclusions of this sort, as preparatory to more direct testimony.

1. Our books relate, that Jesus Christ, the founder of the religion, was, in consequence of his undertaking, put to death, as a malefactor, at Jerusalem. This point at least will be granted, because it is no more than what Tacitus has recorded. They then proceed to tell us, that the religion was, *notwithstanding*, set forth at this same city of Jerusalem, propagated thence throughout Judea, and afterward preached in other parts of the Roman empire. These points also are fully confirmed by Tacitus, who informs us, that the religion, after a short check, broke out again in the country where it took its rise; that it not only spread throughout Judea, but had reached Rome, and that it had there great multitudes of converts: and all this within thirty years after its commencement. Now these facts afford a strong inference in behalf of the proposition which we maintain. What could the disciples of Christ expect for themselves when they saw their Master put to death? Could they hope to escape the dangers in which he had perished? If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you, was the warning of common sense. With this example before their eyes, they could not be without a full sense of the peril of their future enterprise.

2. Secondly, all the histories agree in representing Christ as foretelling the persecution of his followers:—

‘Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.\*’

‘When affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.†’

‘They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake:—and ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolks and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.‡’

‘The time cometh, that he that killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.’§

\* Matt. xxiv. 9.

† Mark iv. 17. See also chap. x. 30.

‡ Luke xxi. 12—16. See also chap. xi. 49.

§ John xvi. 4. See also chap. xv. 20. xvi. 33.

I am not entitled to argue from these passages, that Christ actually did foretell these events, and that they did accordingly come to pass; because that would be at once to assume the truth of the religion: but I am entitled to contend, that one side or other of the following disjunction is true; either that the evangelists have delivered what Christ really spoke, and that the event corresponded with the prediction; or that they put the prediction into Christ's mouth, because, at the time of writing the history, the event had turned out so to be: for, the only two remaining suppositions appear in the highest degree incredible; which are, either that Christ filled the minds of his followers with fears and apprehensions, without any reason or authority for what he said, and contrary to the truth of the case; or that, although Christ had never foretold any such thing, and the event would have contradicted him if he had, yet historians, who lived in the age when the event was known, falsely, as well as officiously, ascribed these words to him.

3. Thirdly, these books abound with exhortations to patience, and with topics of comfort under distress.

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.\*'

'We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body;—knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise us up also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.—For which cause we faint not; but, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.†'

'Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.‡'

'Call to remembrance the former days in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.§'

\* Rom. viii. 35—37.

† James v. 10, 11.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 8—10. 14. 16, 17.

§ Heb. x. 32—36.

'So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom for which ye also suffer.\*'

'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.†'

'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.—Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.‡'

What could all these texts mean, if there was nothing in the circumstances of the times which required patience,—which called for the exercise of constancy and resolution? Or will it be pretended, that these exhortations (which, let it be observed, come not from one author, but from many) were put in, merely to induce a belief in after-ages, that the Christians were exposed to dangers which they were not exposed to, or underwent sufferings which they did not undergo? If these books belong to the age to which they lay claim, and in which age, whether genuine or spurious, they certainly did appear, this supposition cannot be maintained for a moment; because I think it impossible to believe, that passages, which must be deemed not only unintelligible, but false, by the persons into whose hands the books upon their publication were to come, should nevertheless be inserted, for the purpose of producing an effect upon remote generations. In forgeries which do not appear till many ages after that to which they pretend to belong, it is possible that some contrivance of that sort may take place; but in no others can it be attempted.

#### CHAP. IV.

*Direct Evidence of the Sufferings of the First Propagators of Christianity, from the Scriptures and other ancient Christian writings.*

THE account of the treatment of the religion, and of the exertions of its first preachers, as stated in our Scriptures (not in a professed history of persecutions, or in the connected manner in which I am about to recite it, but dispersedly and occasionally in the course of a mixed general history, which circumstance alone negatives the supposition of any fraudulent design), is the following: 'That the Founder of Christianity, from the commencement of his ministry to the time of his violent death, employed himself wholly in publish-

\* 2 Thess. i. 4, 5.

† Rom. v. 3, 4.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13, 19.

ing the institution in Judea and Galilee; that in order to assist him in this purpose, he made choice out of the number of his followers, in twelve persons who might accompany him as he travelled from place to place; that except a short absence upon a journey in which he sent them, two by two, to announce his mission, and one, of a few days, when they went before him to Jerusalem, these persons were stately and constantly attending upon him; that they were with him at Jerusalem when he was apprehended and put to death; and that they were commissioned by him, when his own ministry was concluded, to publish his gospel, and collect disciples to it from all countries of the world.\* The account then proceeds to state, 'that a few days after his departure, these persons, with some of his relations, and some who had regularly frequented their society, assembled at Jerusalem; that considering the office of preaching the religion as now devolved upon them, and one of their number having deserted the cause, and, repenting of his perfidy, having destroyed himself, they proceeded to elect another into his place, and that they were careful to make their election out of the number of those who had accompanied their Master from the first to the last, in order as they alleged that he might be a witness, together with themselves, of the principal facts which they were about to produce and relate concerning him;\* that they began their work at Jerusalem by publicly asserting that this Jesus, whom the rulers and inhabitants of that place had so lately crucified, was, in truth, the person in whom all their prophecies and long expectations terminated; that he had been sent amongst them by God, and that he was appointed by God the future judge of the human species; that all who were solicitous to secure to themselves happiness after death, ought to receive him as such, and to make profession of their belief, by being baptized in his name.† The history goes on to relate, 'that considerable numbers accepted this proposal, and that they who did so, formed amongst themselves a strict union and society,‡ that the attention of the Jewish government being soon drawn upon them, two of the principal persons of the twelve, and who also had lived most intimately and constantly with the Founder of the religion, were seized as they were discoursing to the people in the temple; that after being kept all night in prison, they were brought the next day before an assembly composed of the chief persons of the Jewish magistracy and priesthood; that this assembly, after some consultation, found nothing at that time better to be done towards suppressing the growth of the sect, than to threaten their prisoners with punishment if they persisted; that these men, after expressing in decent but firm language, the obligation under which they considered themselves to be, to declare what they knew, "to speak the things which they had seen and heard," returned from the council, and reported what had passed to their companions; that this report, whilst it apprized them of the danger of their situation and undertaking, had no other effect upon their conduct than to

\* Acts i. 21, 22.

† Acts xi.

‡ Acts iv. 32.



produce in them a general resolution to persevere, and an earnest prayer to God to furnish them with assistance, and to inspire them with fortitude proportioned to the increasing exigency of the service.\* A very short time after this, we read, 'that all the twelve apostles were seized and cast in prison;† that being brought a second time before the Jewish Sanhedrim, they were upbraided with their disobedience to the injunction which had been laid upon them, and beaten for their contumacy; that, being charged once more to desist, they were suffered to depart; that however they neither quitted Jerusalem, nor ceased from preaching, both daily in the temple, and from house to house;‡ and that the twelve considered themselves as so entirely and exclusively devoted to this office, that they now transferred what may be called the temporal affairs of the society to other hands.'§

Hitherto the preachers of the new religion seem to have had the common people on their side; which is assigned as the reason why the Jewish rulers did not, at this time, think it prudent to proceed to greater extremities. It was not long however, before the enemies of the institution found means to represent it to the people as tending to subvert their law, degrade their lawgiver, and dishonor their temple.|| And these insinuations were dispersed with so much success, as to induce the people to join with their superiors in the stoning of a very active member of the new community.

The death of this man was the signal of a general persecution, the activity of which may be judged of from one anecdote of the time: 'As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.'¶ This persecution raged at Jerusalem with so much fury as to drive most of the new converts out of the place, except the twelve apos-

\* Acts iv.

† Acts v. 18.

‡ Acts v. 42.

§ I do not know that it ever has been insinuated, that the Christian mission, in the hands of the apostles, was a scheme for making a fortune, or for getting money. But it may nevertheless be fit to remark upon this passage of their history, how perfectly free they appear to have been from any pecuniary or interested views whatever. The most tempting opportunity which occurred, of making a gain of their converts, was by the custody and management of the public funds, when some of the richer members, intending to contribute their fortunes to the common support of the society, sold their possessions, and laid down the prices at the apostles' feet. Yet, so insensible, or undesirous, were they of the advantage which that confidence afforded, that we find they very soon disposed of the trust, by putting it into the hands, not of nominees of their own, but of stewards formally elected for the purpose by the society at large.

We may add also, that this excess of generosity, which cast private property into the public stock, was so far from being required by the apostles, or imposed as a law of Christianity, that Peter reminds Ananias that he had been guilty, in his behavior, of an officious and voluntary prevarication; 'for whilst,' says he, 'thy estate remained unsold, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?'

|| Acts vi. 12.

¶ Acts viii. 3.

ties.\* The converts, thus 'scattered abroad,' preached the religion wherever they came; and their preaching was, in effect, the preaching of the *twelve*; for it was so far carried on in concert and correspondence with *them*, that when they heard of the success of their emissaries in a particular country, they sent two of their number to the place, to complete and confirm the mission.

An event now took place, of great importance in the future history of the religion. The persecution† which had begun at Jerusalem, followed the Christians to other cities, in which the authority of the Jewish Sanhedrim over those of their own nation was allowed to be exercised. A young man, who had signalized himself by his hostility to the profession, and had procured a commission from the council at Jerusalem to seize any converted Jews whom he might find at Damascus, suddenly became a proselyte to the religion which he was going about to extirpate. The new convert not only shared, on this extraordinary change, the fate of his companions, but brought upon himself a double measure of enmity from the party which he had left. The Jews at Damascus, on his return to that city, watched the gates night and day with so much diligence, that he escaped from their hands only by being let down in a basket by the wall. Nor did he find himself in greater safety at Jerusalem, whither he immediately repaired. Attempts were there also soon set on foot to destroy him; from the danger of which he was preserved by being sent away to Cilicia, his native country.

For some reason not mentioned, perhaps not known, but probably connected with the civil history of the Jews, or with some danger‡ which engrossed the public attention, an intermission about this time took place in the sufferings of the Christians. This happened, at the most, only seven or eight, perhaps only three or four, years after Christ's death. Within which period, and notwithstanding that the late persecution occupied part of it, churches, or societies, of believers, had been formed in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria; for we read that the churches in these countries 'had *now rest*, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.'§ The original preachers of the religion did not remit their labors or activity during this season of quietness, for we find one, and he a very principal person among them, passing throughout all quarters. We find also those

\* Acts viii. 1, 'And they were *all* scattered abroad:' but the term '*all*' is not, I think, to be taken strictly as denoting more than the *generality*; in like manner as in Acts ix. 35, 'And *all* that dwelt in Lydia and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.'

† Acts ix.

‡ Dr. Lardner (in which he is followed also by Dr. Benson) ascribes this cessation of the persecution of the Christians to the attempt of Caligula to set up his own statue in the temple of Jerusalem, and to the consternation thereby excited in the minds of the Jewish people; which consternation for a season suspended every other contest.

§ Acts ix. 31.

who had been before expelled from Jerusalem by the persecution which raged there, travelling as far as Phœnice, Cyprus, and Antioch;\* and lastly, we find Jerusalem again in the centre of the mission, the place whither the preachers returned from their several excursions, where they reported the conduct and effects of their ministry, where questions of public concern were canvassed and settled, whence directions were sought, and teachers sent forth.

The time of this tranquillity did not, however, continue long. Herod Agrippa, who had lately acceded to the government of Judea, 'stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church.† He began his cruelty by beheading one of the twelve original apostles, a kinsman and constant companion of the Founder of the religion. Perceiving that this execution gratified the Jews, he proceeded to seize, in order to put to death, another of the number,—and him, like the former, associated with Christ during his life, and eminently active in the service since his death. This man was, however, delivered from prison, as the account states,‡ miraculously, and made his escape from Jerusalem.

These things are related, not in the general terms under which, in giving the outlines of the history, we have here mentioned them, but with the utmost particularity of names, persons, places, and circumstances; and, what is deserving of notice, without the smallest discoverable propensity in the historian to magnify the fortitude or exaggerate the sufferings of his party. When they fled for their lives, he tells us. When the churches had rest, he remarks it. When the people took their part, he does not leave it without notice. When the apostles were carried a second time before the Sanhedrim, he is careful to observe that they were brought without violence. When milder counsels were suggested, he gives the author of the advice, and the speech which contained it. When, in consequence of this advice, the rulers contented themselves with threatening the apostles, and commanding them to be beaten with stripes, without urging at that time the persecution farther, the historian candidly and distinctly records their forbearance. When, therefore, in other instances, he states heavier persecutions, or actual martyrdoms, it is reasonable to believe that he states them because they were true, and not from any wish to aggravate, in his account, the sufferings which Christians sustained, or to extol, more than it deserved, their patience under them.

Our history now pursues a narrower path. Leaving the rest of the apostles, and the original associates of Christ, engaged in the propagation of the new faith (and who there is not the least reason to believe abated in their diligence or courage), the narrative proceeds with the separate memoirs of that eminent teacher, whose extraordinary and sudden conversion to the religion, and corresponding change of conduct, had before been circumstantially described. This person, in conjunction with another, who appeared among the earlier members of the society at Jerusalem, and amongst

\* Acts xi. 19.

† Acts xii. 1.

‡ Acts xii. 3—17.

the immediate adherents\* of the twelve apostles, set out from Antioch upon the express business of carrying the new religion through the various provinces of the Lesser Asia.† During this expedition, we find, that in almost every place to which they came, their persons were insulted, and their lives endangered. After being expelled from Antioch in Pisidia, they repaired to Iconium.‡ At Iconium, an attempt was made to stone them; at Lystra, whither they fled from Iconium, one of them actually was stoned and drawn out of the city for dead.|| These two men, though not themselves original apostles, were acting in connexion and conjunction with the original apostles; for after the completion of their journey, being sent on a particular commission to Jerusalem, they there related to the apostles§ and elders the events and success of their ministry, and were, in return, recommended by them to the churches, 'as men who had hazarded their lives in the cause.'

The treatment which they had experienced in the first progress, did not deter them from preparing for a second. Upon a dispute, however, arising between them, but not connected with the common subject of their labors, they acted as wise and sincere men would act; they did not retire in disgust from the service in which they were engaged, but, each devoting his endeavors to the advancement of the religion, they parted from one another, and set forwards upon separate routes. The history goes along with one of them; and the second enterprise to him was attended with the same dangers and persecutions as both had met with in the first. The apostle's travels hitherto had been confined to Asia. He now crosses, for the first time, the *Ægean Sea*, and carries with him, amongst others, the person whose accounts supply the information we are stating.¶ The first place in Greece at which he appears to have stopped, was Philippi in Macedonia. Here himself and one of his companions were cruelly whipped, cast into prison, and kept there under the most rigorous custody, being thrust, whilst yet smarting with their wounds, into the inner dungeon, and their feet made fast in the stocks.\*\* Notwithstanding this unequivocal specimen of the usage which they had to look for in that country, they went forward in the execution of their errand. After passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica; in which city, the house in which they lodged was assailed by a party of their enemies, in order to bring them out to the populace. And when, fortunately for their preservation, they were not found at home, the master of the house was dragged before the magistrate for admitting them within his doors.†† Their reception at the next city was something better: but neither had they continued long before their turbulent adversaries, the Jews, excited against them such commotions amongst the inhabitants, as obliged the apostle to make his escape by a private journey to Athens.‡‡ The extremity

\* Acts iv. 36.

§ Acts xiv 19.

\*\* Acts xvi. 23, 24. 33.

† Acts xiii. 2.

|| Acts xv. 12—26.

†† Acts xvii. 1—5.

† Acts xiii. 51.

¶ Acts xvi. 11.

‡‡ Acts xvii. 13.

of the progress was Corinth. His abode in the city, for some time, seems to have been without molestation. At length, however, the Jews found means to stir up an insurrection against him, and to bring him before the tribunal of the Roman president.\* It was to the contempt which that magistrate entertained for the Jews and their controversies, of which he accounted Christianity to be one, that our apostle owed his deliverance.†

This indefatigable teacher, after leaving Corinth, returned by Ephesus into Syria; and again visited Jerusalem, and the society of Christians in that city, which, as hath been repeatedly observed, still continued the centre of the mission.‡ It suited not, however, with the activity of his zeal to remain long at Jerusalem. We find him going thence to Antioch, and, after some stay there, traversing once more the northern provinces of Asia Minor.§ This progress ended at Ephesus; in which city, the apostle continued in the daily exercise of his ministry two years, and until his success, at length, excited the apprehensions of those who were interested in the support of the national worship. Their clamor produced a tumult, in which he had nearly lost his life.|| Undismayed, however, by the dangers to which he saw himself exposed, he was driven from Ephesus only to renew his labors in Greece. After passing over Macedonia, he then proceeded to his former station at Corinth.¶ When he had formed his design of returning by a direct course from Corinth into Syria, he was compelled, by a conspiracy of the Jews, who were prepared to intercept him on his way, to trace back his steps through Macedonia to Philippi, and thence to take shipping into Asia. Along the coast of Asia, he pursued his voyage with all the expedition he could command, in order to reach Jerusalem against the feast of Pentecost.\*\* His reception at Jerusalem was of a piece with the usage he had experienced from the Jews in other places. He had been only a few days in that city, when the populace, instigated by some of his old opponents in Asia, who attended this feast, seized him in the temple, forced him out of it, and were ready immediately to have destroyed him, had not the sudden presence of the Roman guard rescued him out of their hands.†† The officer, however, who had thus seasonably interposed, acted from his care of the public peace, with the preservation of which he was charged, and not from any favor to the apostle, or indeed any disposition to exercise either justice or humanity towards him; for he had no sooner secured his person in the fortress, than he was proceeding to examine him by torture.‡‡

From this time to the conclusion of the history, the apostle remains in public custody of the Roman government. After escaping assassination by a fortunate discovery of the plot, and delivering himself from the influence of his enemies by an appeal to the audience of

\* Acts xviii. 12.

§ Acts xviii. 23.

\*\* Acts xx. 16.

† Acts xviii. 15.

|| Acts xix. 1. 9, 10.

†† Acts xxi. 27—33.

‡ Acts xviii. 22.

¶ Acts xx. 1, 2.

‡‡ Acts xxii. 24.

the emperor,\* he was sent, but not till he had suffered two years' imprisonment, to Rome.† He reached Italy, after a tedious voyage, and after encountering in his passage the perils of a desperate shipwreck.‡ But although still a prisoner, and his fate still depending, neither the various and long-continued sufferings which he had undergone, nor the danger of his present situation, deterred him from persisting in preaching the religion; for the historian closes the account by telling us, that, for two years, he received all that came unto him in his own hired house, where he was permitted to dwell with a soldier that guarded him, 'preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence.'

Now the historian, from whom we have drawn this account, in the part of his narrative which relates to St. Paul, is supported by the strongest corroborating testimony that a history can receive. We are in possession of letters written by St. Paul himself upon the subject of his ministry, and either written during the period which the history comprises, or, if written afterward, reciting and referring to the transactions of that period. These letters, without borrowing from the history, or the history from them, unintentionally confirm the account which the history delivers, in a great variety of particulars. What belongs to our present purpose is the description exhibited of the apostle's sufferings: and the representation, given in the history, of the dangers and distresses which he underwent, not only agrees, in general, with the language which he himself uses whenever he speaks of his life or ministry, but is also, in many instances, attested by a specific correspondency of time, place, and order of events. If the historian put down in his narrative, that at Philippi the apostle 'was beaten with many stripes, cast into prison, and there treated with rigor and indignity;§ we find him, in a letter to a neighboring church,|| reminding his converts, that 'after he had suffered before, and was shamefully entreated at Philippi, he was bold, nevertheless, to speak unto them (to whose city he next came) the gospel of God.' If the history relate,¶ that at Thessalonica, the house in which the apostle was lodged, when he first came to that place, was assaulted by the populace, and the master of it dragged before the magistrate for admitting such a guest within his doors; the apostle, in his letter to the Christians of Thessalonica, calls to their remembrance 'how they had received the gospel in much affliction.\*\* If the history deliver an account of an insurrection at Ephesus, which had nearly cost the apostle his life; we have the apostle himself, in a letter written a short time after his departure from that city, describing his despair, and returning thanks for his deliverance.†† If the history inform us, that the apostle was expelled from Antioch in Pisidia, attempted to be stoned at Iconium, and

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\* Acts xxv. 9. 11.

§ Acts xvi. 23, 24.

\*\* 1 Thess. i. 6.

† Acts xxiv. 27.

|| 1 Thess. ii. 2.

†† Acts xix. 2 Cor. i. 8—10.

† Acts xxvii.

¶ Acts xvii. 5.

actually stoned at Lystra; there is preserved a letter from him to a favorite convert, whom, as the same history tells us, he first met with in these parts; in which letter he appeals to that disciple's knowledge 'of the persecutions which befell him at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.\* If the history make the apostle, in his speech to the Ephesian elders, remind them, as one proof of the disinterestedness of his views, that, to their knowledge, he had supplied his own and the necessities of his companions by personal labor;† we find the same apostle, in a letter written during his residence at Ephesus, asserting of himself, 'that even to that hour he labored, working with his own hands.‡

These coincidences, together with many relative to other parts of the apostle's history, and *all* drawn from independent sources, not only confirm the truth of the account, in the particular points as to which they are observed, but add much to the credit of the narrative in all its parts: and support the author's profession of being a contemporary of the person whose history he writes, and throughout a material portion of his narrative, a companion.

What the epistles of the apostles declare of the suffering state of Christianity, the writings which remain of their companions and immediate followers expressly confirm.

Clement, who is honorably mentioned by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians,§ hath left us his attestation to this point, in the following words: 'Let us take (says he) the examples of our own age. Through zeal and envy, the most faithful and righteous pillars of the church have been persecuted even to the most grievous deaths. Let us set before our eyes *the holy apostles*. Peter, by unjust envy, underwent, not one or two, but many sufferings; till at last, being martyred, he went to the place of glory that was due unto him. For the same cause did Paul, in like manner, receive the reward of his patience. Seven times he was in bonds; he was whipped, was stoned; he preached both in the East and in the West, leaving behind him the glorious report of his faith; and so having taught the whole world righteousness, and for that end travelled even unto the utmost bounds of the West, he at last suffered martyrdom by the command of the governors, and departed out of the world, and went unto his holy place, being become a most eminent pattern of patience unto all ages. To these holy apostles were joined a very great number of others, who, having through envy undergone, in like manner, many pains and torments, have left a glorious example to us. For this, not only men, but women, have been persecuted; and, having suffered very grievous and cruel punishments, have finished the course of their faith with firmness.'||

Hermas, saluted by Saint Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, in a piece very little connected with historical recitals, thus speaks-

\* Acts xiii. 50. xiv. 5. 19. 2 Tim. iii. 10, 11.

† 1 Cor. iv. 11, 12.

‡ Clem. ad Cor. c. v. vi. Adp. Wake's Trans.

† Acts xx. 34.

§ Philipp. iv. 3.

‘Such as have believed and suffered death for the name of Christ, and have endured with a ready mind, and have given up their lives with all their hearts.\*’

Polycarp, the disciple of John (though all that remains of his works be a very short epistle,) has not left this subject unnoticed. ‘I exhort (says he) all of you, that ye obey the word of righteousness, and exercise all patience, which ye have seen set forth before your eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius, and Lorimus, and Rufus, but in others among yourselves, and in *Paul himself and the rest of the apostles*; being confident in this, that all these have not run in vain; but in faith and righteousness; and are gone to the place that was due to them from the Lord, with whom also they suffered. For they loved not this present world, but Him who died, and was raised again by God for us.†

Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, recognizes the same topic, briefly indeed, but positively and precisely. ‘For this cause (*i. e.* having felt and handled Christ’s body after his resurrection, and being convinced, as Ignatius expresses it, both by his flesh and spirit), they (*i. e.* Peter, and those who were present with Peter at Christ’s appearance) despised death, and were found to be above it.‡

Would the reader know what a persecution in these days was, I would refer him to a circular letter, written by the church of Smyrna soon after the death of Polycarp, who, it will be remembered, had lived with Saint John; and which letter is entitled a relation of that bishop’s martyrdom. ‘The sufferings (say they) of all the other martyrs, were blessed and generous, which they underwent according to the will of God. For so it becomes us, who are more religious than others, to ascribe the power and ordering of all things unto him. And indeed who can choose but admire the greatness of their minds, and that admirable patience and love of their Master, which then appeared in them? Who, when they were so flayed with whipping, that the frame and structure of their bodies were laid open to their very inward veins and arteries, nevertheless endured it. In like manner, those who were condemned to the beasts, and kept a long time in prison, underwent many cruel torments, being forced to lie upon sharp spikes laid under their bodies, and tormented with divers other sorts of punishments; that so, if it were possible, the tyrant, by the length of their sufferings, might have brought them to deny Christ.§

## CHAP. V.

### *Observations on the Preceding Evidence.*

ON the history, of which the last chapter contains an abstract, there are a few observations which it may be proper to make, by way of applying its testimony to the particular propositions for which we contend.

\* Shepherd of Hermas. c. xxviii.

† Pol. ad Phil. c. ix.



I. Although our Scripture history leaves the general account of the apostles in an early part of the narrative, and proceeds with the separate account of one particular apostle, yet the information which it delivers so far extends to the rest, as it shows *the nature of the service*. When we see one apostle suffering persecution in the discharge of his commission, we shall not believe, without evidence, that the same office could, at the same time, be attended with ease and safety to others. And this fair and reasonable inference is confirmed by the direct attestation of the letters, to which we have so often referred. The writer of these letters not only alludes, in numerous passages, to his own sufferings, but speaks of the rest of the apostles as enduring like sufferings with himself. 'I think that God hath set forth *us the apostles* last, as it were, appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men;—even unto this present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and as the offscouring of all things unto this day.\*' Add to which, that in the short account that is given of the other apostles in the former part of the history, and within the short period which that account comprises, we find, first, two of them seized, imprisoned, brought before the Sanhedrim, and threatened with farther punishment;† then, the whole number imprisoned and beaten:‡ soon afterward, one of their adherents stoned to death, and so hot a persecution raised against the sect, as to drive most of them out of the place; a short time only succeeding, before one of the twelve was beheaded, and another sentenced to the same fate; and all this passing in the single city of Jerusalem, and within ten years after the Founder's death, and the commencement of the institution.

II. We take no credit at present for the miraculous part of the narrative, nor do we insist upon the correctness of single passages of it. If the whole story be not a novel, a romance; the whole action a dream; if Peter, and James, and Paul, and the rest of the apostles mentioned in the account, be not all imaginary persons; if their letters be not all forgeries, and, what is more, forgeries of names and characters which never existed; then is their evidence in our hands sufficient to support the only fact we contend for (and which, I repeat again, is, in itself, highly probable), that the original followers of Jesus Christ exerted great endeavors to propagate his religion, and underwent great labors, dangers, and sufferings, in consequence of their undertaking.

III. The general reality of the apostolic history is strongly confirmed by the consideration, that it, in truth, does no more than assign adequate causes for effects which certainly were produced, and describe consequences naturally resulting from situations which certainly existed. The *effects* were certainly these, of which this

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\* 1 Cor. iv. 9, &c.

† Acts iv. 3. 21.

‡ Acts v. 18. 40.

history sets forth the cause, and origin, and progress. It is acknowledged on all hands, because it is recorded by other testimony than that of the Christians themselves, that the religion began to prevail at that time, and in that country. It is very difficult to conceive how it could begin, or prevail at all, without the exertions of the Founder and his followers in propagating the new persuasion. The history now in our hands describes these exertions, the persons employed, the means and endeavors made use of, and the labors undertaken in the prosecution of this purpose. Again, the treatment which the history represents the first propagators of the religion to have experienced, was no other than what naturally resulted from the situation in which they were confessedly placed. It is admitted that the religion was adverse, in a great degree, to the reigning opinions, and to the hopes and wishes of the nation to which it was first introduced; and that it overthrew, so far as it was received, the established theology and worship of every other country. We cannot feel much reluctance in believing, that, when the messengers of such a system went about not only publishing their opinions, but collecting proselytes, and forming regular societies of proselytes, they should meet with opposition in their attempts, or that this opposition should sometimes proceed to fatal extremities. Our history details examples of this opposition, and of the sufferings and dangers which the emissaries of the religion underwent, perfectly agreeable to what might reasonably be expected from the nature of their undertaking, compared with the character of the age and country in which it was carried on.

IV. The records before us supply evidence of what formed another member of our general proposition, and what, as hath already been observed, is highly probable, and almost a necessary consequence of their new profession; viz. that, together with activity and courage in propagating the religion, the primitive followers of Jesus assumed, upon their conversion, a new and peculiar course of private life. Immediately after their Master was withdrawn from them, we hear of their 'continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication;'<sup>\*</sup> of their 'continuing daily with one accord in the temple;'<sup>†</sup> of 'many being gathered together praying.'<sup>‡</sup> We know what strict injunctions were laid upon the converts by their teachers. Wherever they came, the first word of their preaching was, 'Repent!' We know that these injunctions obliged them to refrain from many species of licentiousness, which were not, at that time, reputed criminal. We know the rules of purity, and the maxims of benevolence, which Christians read in their books; concerning which rules, it is enough to observe, that, if they were, I will not say completely obeyed, but in any degree regarded, they would produce a system of conduct, and, what is more difficult to preserve, a disposition of mind, and a regulation of affections, different from any thing to which they had hitherto been accustomed, and different from what they would see in others. The change and

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<sup>\*</sup> Acts i. 14.<sup>†</sup> Acts ii. 46.<sup>‡</sup> Acts xii. 12.

distinction of manners, which resulted from their new character, is perpetually referred to in the letters of their teachers. 'And you hath he quickened, who *were* dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in *times past* ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.'\*—'For the *time past of our life* may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; *wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot.*' Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, after enumerating, as his manner was, a catalogue of vicious characters, adds, 'Such *were* some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified.†' In like manner, and alluding to the same change of practices and sentiments, he asks the Roman Christians, 'what fruit they had in those things, whereof they are *now* ashamed!‡' The phrases which the same writer employs to describe the moral condition of Christians, compared with their condition before they became Christians, such as 'newness of life,' being 'freed from sin,' being 'dead to sin;' 'the destruction of the body of sin, that, *for the future*, they should not serve sin;' 'children of light, and of the day,' as opposed to 'children of darkness and of the night;' 'not sleeping as others;' imply, at least, a new system of obligation, and, probably, a new series of conduct, commencing with their conversion.

The testimony which Pliny bears to the behavior of the new sect in his time, and which testimony comes not more than fifty years after that of Saint Paul, is very applicable to the subject under consideration. The character which this writer gives of the Christians of that age, and which was drawn from a pretty accurate inquiry, because he considered their moral principles as the point in which the magistrate was interested, is as follows:—He tells the emperor, 'that some of those who had relinquished the society, or who, to save themselves, pretended that they had relinquished it, affirmed that they were wont to meet together, on a stated day, before it was light, and sang among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as a God; and to bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but that they would not be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; that they would never falsify their word, or deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it.' This proves that a morality, more pure and strict than was ordinary, prevailed at that time in Christian societies. And to me it appears, that we are authorized to carry this testimony back to the age of the apostles; because it is not probable that the imme-

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\* Eph. ii. 1—3. See also Tit. iii. 3.

† 1 Cor. vi. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 3, 4.

§ Rom. vi. 21.

diate hearers and disciples of Christ were more relaxed than their successors in Pliny's time, or the missionaries of the religion than those whom they taught.

## CHAP. VI.

*That the Story, for which the first Propagators of Christianity suffered, was miraculous.*

WHEN we consider, first, the prevalency of the religion at this hour; secondly, the only credible account which can be given of its origin, viz. the activity of the Founder and his associates; thirdly, the opposition which that activity must naturally have excited; fourthly, the fate of the Founder of the religion, attested by heathen writers as well as our own; fifthly, the testimony of the same writers to the sufferings of Christians, either contemporary with, or immediately succeeding, the original settlers of the institution; sixthly, predictions of the sufferings of his followers ascribed to the Founder of the religion, which ascription alone proves, either that such predictions were delivered and fulfilled, or that the writers of Christ's life were induced by the event to attribute such predictions to him; seventhly, letters now in our possession, written by some of the principal agents in the transaction, referring expressly to extreme labors, dangers, and sufferings, sustained by themselves and their companions; lastly, a history purporting to be written by a fellow-traveller of one of the new teachers, and, by its unsophisticated correspondence with letters of that person still extant, proving itself to be written by some one well acquainted with the subject of the narrative, which history contains accounts of travels, persecutions, and martyrdoms, answering to what the former reasons led us to expect: when we lay together these considerations, which, taken separately, are, I think, correctly, such as I have stated them in the preceding chapters, there cannot much doubt remain upon our minds, but that a number of persons at that time appeared in the world, publicly advancing an extraordinary story, and, for the sake of propagating the belief of that story, voluntarily incurring great personal dangers, traversing seas and kingdoms, exerting great industry, and sustaining great extremities of ill usage and persecution. It is also proved, that the same persons, in consequence of their persuasion, or pretended persuasion, of the truth of what they asserted, entered upon a course of life in many respects new and singular.

From the clear and acknowledged parts of the case, I think it to be likewise in the highest degree probable, that the story, for which these persons voluntarily exposed themselves to the fatigues and hardships which they endured, was a *miraculous* story; I mean, that they pretended to miraculous evidence of some kind or other. They had nothing else to stand upon. The designation of the person, that is to say, that Jesus of Nazareth, rather than any other

person, was the Messiah, and as such the subject of their ministry, could only be founded upon supernatural tokens attributed to him. Here were no victories, no conquests, no revolutions, no surprising elevation of fortune, no achievements of valor, of strength, or of policy, to appeal to; no discoveries in any art or science, no great efforts of genius or learning to produce.

A Galilean peasant was announced to the world as a divine law-giver. A young man of mean condition, of a private and simple life, and who had wrought no deliverance for the Jewish nation, was declared to be their Messiah. This, without ascribing to him at the same time some proofs of his mission, (and what other but supernatural proofs could there be?) was too absurd a claim to be either imagined, or attempted, or credited. In whatever degree, or in whatever part, the religion was *argumentative*, when it came to the question, 'Is the carpenter's son of Nazareth the person whom we are to receive and obey?' there was nothing but the miracles attributed to him, by which his pretensions could be maintained for a moment. Every controversy and every question must presuppose these; for, however such controversies, when they did arise, might, and naturally would, be discussed upon their own grounds of argumentation, without citing the miraculous evidence which had been asserted to attend the Founder of the religion (which would have been to enter upon another, and a more general question), yet we are to bear in mind, that without previously supposing the existence, or the pretence of such evidence, there could have been no place for the discussion of the argument at all. Thus, for example, whether the prophecies, which the Jews interpreted to belong to the Messiah, were, or were not, applicable to the history of Jesus of Nazareth, was a natural subject of debate in those times; and the debate would proceed, without recurring at every turn to his miracles, because it set out with supposing these; inasmuch as without miraculous marks and tokens (real or pretended) or without some such great change effected by his means in the public condition of the country, as might have satisfied the then received interpretation of these prophecies, I do not see how the question could ever have been entertained. Apollos, we read, 'mightily convinced the Jews, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ;\*' but unless Jesus had exhibited some distinction of his person, some proof of supernatural power, the argument from the old Scriptures could have had no place. It had nothing to attach upon. A young man calling himself the Son of God, gathering a crowd about him, and delivering to them lectures of morality could not have excited so much as a doubt among the Jews whether he was the object in whom a long series of ancient prophecies terminated, from the completion of which they had formed such magnificent expectations, and expectations of a nature so opposite to what appeared; I mean, no such doubt could exist when they had the whole case before them, when they saw him put t

death for his officiousness, and when by his death the evidence concerning him was closed. Again, the *effect* of the Messiah's coming, supposing Jesus to have been he, upon Jews, upon Gentiles, upon their relation to each other, upon their acceptance with God, upon their duties and their expectations; his nature, authority, office, and agency; were likely to become subjects of much consideration with the early votaries of the religion, and to occupy their attention and writings. I should not however expect, that in these disquisitions, whether preserved in the form of letters, speeches, or set treatises, frequent or very direct mention of his miracles would occur. Still, miraculous evidence lay at the bottom of the argument. In the *primary* question, miraculous pretensions, and miraculous pretensions alone, were what they had to rely upon.

That the original story was miraculous, is very fairly also inferred from the miraculous powers which were laid claim to by the Christians of succeeding ages. If the accounts of these miracles be true, it was a continuation of the same powers; if they be false, it was in *imitation*, I will not say, of what had been wrought, but of what had been reported to have been wrought, by those who preceded them. That imitation should follow reality, fiction should be grafted upon truth; that, if miracles were performed at first, miracles should be pretended afterward; agrees so well with the ordinary course of human affairs, that we can have no great difficulty in believing it. The contrary supposition is very improbable, namely, that miracles should be pretended to by the followers of the apostles and first emissaries of religion, when none were pretended to, either in their own persons or that of their Master, by these apostles and emissaries themselves.

## CHAP. VII.

*That it was in the main the Story which we have now proved, by indirect Considerations.*

It being then once proved, that the first propagators of the Christian institution did exert activity, and subject themselves to great dangers and sufferings, in consequence, and for the sake of an extraordinary, and, I think we may say, of a miraculous story of some kind or other; the next great question is, Whether the account which our Scriptures contain, be that story; that which these men delivered, and for which they acted and suffered as they did? This question is, in effect, no other than whether the story which Christians have *now*, be the story which Christians had *then*? And of this the following proofs may be deduced from general considerations prior to any inquiry into the particular reasons and testimonies by which the authority of our histories is supported.

In the first place, there exists no trace or vestige of any other story. It is not, like the death of Cyrus the Great, a competition between opposite accounts, or between the credit of different histo-

rians. There is not a document, or scrap of account, either contemporary with the commencement of Christianity, or extant within many ages after that commencement, which assigns a history substantially differing from ours. The remote, brief, and incidental notices of the affair, which are found in heathen writers, so far as they do go, go along with us. They bear testimony to these facts:—that the institution originated from Jesus; that the Founder was put to death, as a malefactor, at Jerusalem, by the authority of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; that the religion nevertheless spread in that city, and throughout Judea; and that it was propagated thence to distant countries; that the converts were numerous; that they suffered great hardships and injuries for their profession; and that all this took place in the age of the world which our books have assigned. They go on farther, to describe the *manners* of Christians, in terms perfectly conformable to the accounts extant in our books; that they were wont to assemble on a certain day; that they sang hymns to Christ as to a god; that they bound themselves by an oath not to commit any crime, but to abstain from theft and adultery, to adhere strictly to their promises, and not to deny money deposited in their hands;\* that they worshipped him who was crucified in Palestine; that this their first lawgiver had taught them that they were all brethren; that they had a great contempt for the things of this world, and looked upon them as common; that they flew to one another's relief; that they cherished strong hopes of immortality; that they despised death, and surrendered themselves to sufferings.† This is the account of writers who viewed the subject at a great distance; who were uninformed and uninterested about it. It bears the characters of such an account upon the face of it, because it describes effects, namely, the appearance in the world of a new religion, and the conversion of great multitudes to it, without descending, in the smallest degree, to the detail of the transaction upon which it was founded, the interior of the institution, the evidence or arguments offered by those who drew over others to it. Yet still here is no contradiction of our story; no

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\* See Pliny's Letter.—Bonnet, in his lively way of expressing himself, says,—‘Comparing Pliny's Letter with the account in the Acts, it seems to me that I had not taken up another author, but that I was still reading the historian of that extraordinary society.’ This is strong: but there is undoubtedly an affinity, and all the affinity that could be expected.

† ‘It is incredible what expedition they use when any of their friends are known to be in trouble. In a word, they spare nothing upon such an occasion:—for these miserable men have no doubt they shall be immortal and live for ever: therefore they condemn death, and many surrender themselves to sufferings. Moreover, their first lawgiver has taught them that they are all brethren, when once they have turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worship this Master of theirs who was crucified, and engage to live according to his laws. They have also a sovereign contempt for all the things of this world, and look upon them as common.’—Lucian. *de Morte Peregrini*, t. i. p. 565. ed. Græv.

other or different story set up against it: but so far a confirmation of it, as that, in the general points on which the heathen account touches, it agrees with that which we find in our own books.

The same may be observed of the very few Jewish writers, of that and the adjoining period, which have come down to us. Whatever they omit, or whatever difficulties we may find in explaining the omission; they advance no other history of the transaction than that which we acknowledge. Josephus, who wrote his *Antiquities*, or *History of the Jews*, about sixty years after the commencement of Christianity, in a passage generally admitted as genuine, makes mention of John, under the name of John the Baptist; that he was a preacher of virtue; that he baptized his proselytes; that he was well received by the people; that he was imprisoned and put to death by Herod; and that Herod lived in a criminal cohabitation with Herodias his brother's wife.\* In another passage, allowed by many, although not without considerable question being moved about it, we hear of 'James, the brother of him who was called Jesus, and of his being put to death.'† In a third passage, extant in every copy that remains of Josephus's *History*, but the authenticity of which has nevertheless been long disputed, we have an explicit testimony to the substance of our history in these words:—'At that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man, for he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the cross, they who before had conceived an affection for him, did not cease to adhere to him: for, on the third day, he appeared to them alive again; the divine prophets having foretold these and many wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of the Christians, so called from him, subsist to this time.‡' Whatever becomes of the controversy concerning the genuineness of this passage; whether Josephus go the whole length of our history, which, if the passage be sincere, he does; or whether he proceed only a very little way with us, which, if the passage be rejected, we confess to be the case; still what we asserted is true, that he gives no other different history of the subject from ours, no other or different account of the origin of the institution. And I think also that it may with great reason be contended, either that the passage is genuine, or that the silence of Josephus was *designed*. For, although we should lay aside the authority of our own books entirely, yet when Tacitus, who wrote not twenty, perhaps not ten, years after Josephus, in his account of a period in which Josephus was nearly thirty years of age, tells us, that a vast multitude of Christians were condemned at Rome; that they derived their denomination from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death, as a criminal, by the procu-

\* *Antiq.* l. xviii. cap. v. sect. 1, 2.

† *Antiq.* l. xx. cap. ix. sect. 1.

‡ *Antiq.* l. xviii. cap. iii. sect. 3.



rator, Pontius Pilate; that the superstition had spread not only over Judea, the source of the evil, but had reached Rome also:—when Suetonius, an historian contemporary with Tacitus, relates that, in the time of Claudius, the Jews were making disturbances at Rome, Christus being their leader; and that, during the reign of Nero, the Christians were punished; under both which emperors Josephus lived:—when Pliny, who wrote his celebrated epistle not more than thirty years after the publication of Josephus's history, found the Christians in such numbers in the province of Bithynia, as to draw from him a complaint, that the contagion had seized cities, towns, and villages, and had so seized them as to produce a general desertion of the public rites; and when, as has already been observed, there is no reason for imagining that the Christians were more numerous in Bithynia than in many other parts of the Roman empire: it cannot, I should suppose, after this, be believed, that the religion, and the transaction upon which it was founded, were too obscure to engage the attention of Josephus, or to obtain a place in his history. Perhaps he did not know how to represent the business, and disposed of his difficulties by passing it over in silence. Eusebius wrote the life of Constantine, yet omits entirely the most remarkable circumstance in that life, the death of his son Crispus; undoubtedly for the reason here given. The reserve of Josephus upon the subject of Christianity appears also in his passing over the banishment of the Jews by Claudius, which Suetonius, we have seen, has recorded with an express reference to Christ. This is at least as remarkable as his silence about the infants of Bethlehem.\* Be, however, the fact, or the cause of the omission in Josephus,† what it may, no other or different history on the subject has been given by him, or is pretended to have been given.

But farther; the whole series of Christian writers, from the first age of the institution down to the present, in their discussions, apologies, arguments, and controversies, proceed upon the general story which our Scriptures contain, and upon no other. The main facts, the principal agents, are alike in all. This argument will appear to be of great force, when it is known that we are able to trace back the series of writers to a contact with the historical books of

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\* Michaelis has computed, and, as it should seem, fairly enough, that probably not more than twenty children perished by this cruel precaution. Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, translated by Marsh, vol. 1. c. ii. sect. 11.

† There is no notice taken of Christianity in the Misna, a collection of Jewish traditions compiled about the year 180; although it contains a tract 'De cultu peregrino,' of strange or idolatrous worship: yet it cannot be disputed but that Christianity was perfectly well known in the world at this time. There is extremely little notice of the subject in the Jerusalem Talmud, compiled about the year 300, and not much more in the Babylonish Talmud, of the year 500; although both these works are of a religious nature, and although, when the first was compiled, Christianity was on the point of becoming the religion of the state, and, when the latter was published, had been so for 200 years.

the New Testament, and to the age of the first emissaries of the religion, and to deduce it, by an unbroken continuation, from that end of the train to the present.

The remaining letters of the apostles (and what more original than *their* letters can we have?) though written without the remotest design of transmitting the history of Christ, or of Christianity, to future ages, or even of making it known to their contemporaries, incidentally disclose to us the following circumstances:—Christ's descent and family; his innocence; the meekness and gentleness of his character (a recognition which goes to the whole Gospel history); his exalted nature; his circumcision; his transfiguration; his life of opposition and suffering; his patience and resignation; the appointment of the eucharist, and the manner of it; his agony; his confession before Pontius Pilate; his stripes, crucifixion, and burial; his resurrection; his appearance after it, first to Peter, then to the rest of the apostles; his ascension into heaven, and his designation to be the future judge of mankind;—the stated residence of the apostles at Jerusalem; the working of miracles by the first preachers of the gospel, who were also the hearers of Christ;\*—the successful propagation of the religion; the persecution of its followers; the miraculous conversion of Paul; miracles wrought by himself, and alleged in his controversies with his adversaries, and in letters to the persons amongst whom they were wrought; finally, that *MIRACLES were the signs of an apostle.*†

In an epistle bearing the name of Barnabas, the companion of Paul, probably genuine, certainly belonging to that age, we have the sufferings of Christ, his choice of apostles and their number, his passion, the scarlet robe, the vinegar and gall, the mocking and piercing, the casting lots for his coat,‡ his resurrection on the eighth (i. e. the first day of the week),§ and the commemorative distinction of that day, his manifestation after his resurrection, and, lastly, his ascension. We have also his miracles generally but positively referred to in the following words: 'Finally, teaching the people of

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\* Heb. ii. 3; 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us *by them that heard him*; God also bearing them witness, both *with signs and wonders*, and with *divers miracles*, and gifts of the Holy Ghost!' I allege this Epistle without hesitation; for, whatever doubts may have been raised about its author, there can be none concerning the age in which it was written. No epistle in the collection carries about it more indubitable marks of antiquity than this does. It speaks, for instance, throughout, of the temple as then standing, and of the worship of the temple as then subsisting.—Heb. viii. 4; 'For, if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing there *are* priests that offer according to the law.'—Again, Heb. xiii. 10; 'We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which *serve* the tabernacle.'

† 'Truly the *signs of an apostle* were wrought among you in all *piety*, in signs, in wonders, and mighty deeds.' 2 Cor. xii. 12.

‡ Ep. Bar. c. vii.

§ Ep. Bar. c. vi.

Israel, and *doing many wonders and signs among them*, he preached to them, and showed the exceeding great love which he bare towards them.\*

In an epistle of Clement, a hearer of Saint Paul, although written for a purpose remotely connected with the Christian history, we have the resurrection of Christ, and the subsequent mission of the apostles, recorded in these satisfactory terms: 'The apostles have preached to us from our Lord Jesus Christ from God:—for, having received their command, and being *thoroughly assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they went abroad, publishing that the kingdom of God was at hand.† We find noticed also, the humility, yet the power of Christ,‡ his descent from Abraham, his crucifixion. We have Peter and Paul represented as faithful and righteous pillars of the church; the numerous sufferings of Peter; the bonds, stripes, and stoning of Paul, and, more particularly, his extensive and unwearied travels.

In an epistle of Polycarp, a disciple of Saint John, though only a brief hortatory letter, we have the humility, patience, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension, of Christ, together with the apostolic character of Saint Paul, distinctly recognized.§ Of this same father we are also assured by Irenæus, that he (Irenæus) had heard him relate, 'what he had received from eye-witnesses concerning the Lord, both *concerning his miracles* and his doctrine.'||

In the remaining works of Ignatius, the contemporary of Polycarp, larger than those of Polycarp (yet like those of Polycarp, treating of subjects in nowise leading to any recital of the Christian history), the occasional allusions are proportionably more numerous. The descent of Christ from David, his mother Mary, his miraculous conception, the star at his birth, his baptism by John, the reason assigned for it, his appeal to the prophets, the ointment poured on his head, his sufferings under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, his resurrection, the Lord's day called and kept in commemoration of it, and the eucharist, in both its parts—are unequivocally referred to. Upon the resurrection, this writer is even circumstantial. He mentions the apostles' eating and drinking with Christ after he had risen, their feeling and their handling him; from which last circumstance Ignatius raises this just reflection:—'They believed, being convinced both by his flesh and spirit; for this cause, they despised death, and were found to be above it.'¶

Quadratus, of the same age with Ignatius, has left us the following noble testimony:—'The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both those that were healed, and those that were raised from the dead; who were seen not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterward; not only whilst he dwelled on this earth, but also after his depar-

\* Ep. Bar. c. v. † Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xlii. ‡ Ep. Clem. Rom. c. xvi.

§ Pol. Ep. ad Phil. c. v. viii. ii. iii.

|| Ir. ad Flor. ap. Euseb. l. v. c. 20.

¶ Ad Smyr. c. iii.

ture, and for a good while after it, insomuch that some of them have reached to our times.\*

Justin Martyr came little more than thirty years after Quadratus. From Justin's works, which are still extant, might be collected a tolerably complete account of Christ's life, in all points agreeing with that which is delivered in our Scriptures; taken indeed, in a great measure, from those Scriptures, but still proving that this account, and no other, was the account known and extant in that age. The miracles in particular, which form the part of Christ's history most material to be traced, stand fully and distinctly recognized in the following passage:—'He healed those who had been blind, and deaf, and lame, from their birth; causing, by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to see: and by raising the dead, and making them to live, he induced, by his works, the men of that age to know him.†

It is unnecessary to carry these citations lower, because the history, after this time, occurs in ancient Christian writings as familiarly as it is wont to do in modern sermons;—occurs always the same in substance, and always that which our evangelists represent.

This is not only true of those writings of Christians, which are genuine, and of acknowledged authority; but it is, in a great measure, true of *all* their ancient writings which remain; although some of these may have been erroneously ascribed to authors to whom they did not belong, or may contain false accounts, or may appear to be undeserving of credit, or never indeed to have obtained any. Whatever fables they have mixed with the narrative, they preserve the material parts, the leading facts, as we have them; and so far as they do this, although they be evidence of nothing else, they are evidence that these points were *fixed*, were received and acknowledged by all Christians in the age in which the books were written. At least, it may be asserted, that in the places where we were most likely to meet with such things, if such things had existed, no relics appear of any story substantially different from the present, as the cause or as the pretence of the institution.

Now that the original story, the story delivered by the first preachers of the institution, should have died away so entirely as to have left no record or memorial of its existence, although so many records and memorials of the time and transaction remain; and that another story should have stepped into its place, and gained exclusive possession of the belief of all who professed themselves disciples of the institution, is beyond any example of the corruption of even oral tradition, and still less consistent with the experience of written history: and this improbability, which is very great, is rendered still greater by the reflection, that no such *change* as the oblivion of one story, and the substitution of another, took

\* Ap. Euseb. H. E. lib. iv. c. 3.

† Just. Dial. cum. Tryph. p. 238. ed. Thirl.

place in any future period of the Christian era. Christianity hath travelled through dark and turbulent ages; nevertheless, it came out of the cloud and the storm, such in substance, as it entered in. Many additions were made to the primitive history, and these entitled to different degrees of credit; many doctrinal errors also were from time to time grafted into the public creed; but still the original story remained, and remained the same. In all its principal parts, it has been fixed from the beginning.

Thirdly: The religious rites and usages that prevailed amongst the early disciples of Christianity were such as belonged to, and sprung out of, the narrative in our hands; which accordancy shows that it was the narrative upon which these persons acted, and which they had received from their teachers. Our account makes the Founder of the religion direct that his disciples should be baptized. We know that the first Christians were baptized. Our account makes him direct, that they should hold religious assemblies: we find that they did hold religious assemblies. Our accounts make the apostles assemble upon a stated day of the week: we find, and that from information perfectly independent of our accounts, that the Christians of the first century did observe stated days of assembling. Our histories record the institution of the rite which we call the Lord's supper, and a command to repeat it in perpetual succession: we find amongst the early Christians, the celebration of this rite universal. And, indeed, we find, concurring in all the above-mentioned observances, Christian societies of many different nations and languages, removed from one another by a great distance of place, and dissimilitude of situation. It is also extremely material to remark, that there is no room for insinuating that our books were fabricated with a studious accommodation to the usages which obtained at the time they were written; that the authors of the books found the usages *established*, and framed the story to account for their original. The Scripture accounts especially of the Lord's supper are too short and cursory, not to say too obscure, and, in this view, deficient, to allow a place for any such suspicion.\*

Amongst the proofs of the truth of this proposition, viz. that the story which we have *now* is, in substance, the story which the Christians had *then*, or, in other words, that the accounts in our Gospels are, as to their principal parts at least, the accounts which the apostles and original teachers of the religion delivered, one arises from observing that it appears by the Gospels themselves, that the story was public at the time; that the Christian community was already in possession of the substance and principal parts of the narrative. The Gospels were not the original cause of the Christian history being believed, but were themselves among the

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\* The reader, who is conversant in these researches, by comparing the short Scripture accounts of the Christian rites above mentioned, with the minute and circumstantial directions contained in the pretended apostolical constitutions, will see the force of this observation; the difference between truth and forgery.

consequences of that belief. This is expressly affirmed by St. Luke, in his brief, but, as I think, very important and instructive, preface: 'Forasmuch (says the evangelist) as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things *which are most surely believed amongst us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word*; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things *wherein thou hast been instructed*.'—This short introduction testifies, that the substance of the history which the evangelist was about to write, was already believed by Christians; that it was believed upon the declaration of eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; that it formed the account of their religion in which Christians were instructed; that the office which the historian proposed to himself, was to trace each particular to its origin, and to fix the certainty of many things which the reader had before heard of. In St. John's Gospel, the same point appears hence, that there are some principal facts to which the historian refers, but which he does not relate. A remarkable instance of this kind is the *ascension*, which is not mentioned by Saint John in its place, at the conclusion of his history, but which is plainly referred to in the following words of the sixth chapter: \* 'What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?' And still more positively in the words which Christ, according to our evangelist, spoke to Mary after his resurrection, 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go unto my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God.†' This can only be accounted for by the supposition that Saint John wrote under a sense of the notoriety of Christ's ascension, amongst those by whom his book was likely to be read. The same account must also be given of Saint Mathew's omission of the same important fact. The thing was very well known, and it did not occur to the historian that it was necessary to add any particulars concerning it. It agrees also with this solution and with no other, that neither Matthew nor John disposes of the person of our Lord in any manner whatever. Other intimations in Saint John's Gospel of the then general notoriety of the story are the following: His manner of introducing his narrative, (ch. 1. ver. 15.) 'John bare witness of him, and cried, saying'—evidently presupposes that his readers knew who John was. His rapid parenthetical reference to John's imprisonment, 'for John was not yet cast into prison,‡' could only come from a writer whose mind was in the habit of considering John's imprisonment as perfectly notorious. The description of Andrew by the addition 'Simon Peter's brother,§' takes it for granted, that Simon Peter was well known. His name had not been mentioned before. The evangelist's noticing|| the prevailing

\* Also John ii. 13, and xvi. 28.

† John iii. 24.

§ John ii. 40.

† John xx. 17.

|| John xxi. 24.

misconstruction of a discourse, which Christ held with the beloved disciple, proves that the characters and the discourse were already public. And the observation which these instances afford, is of equal validity for the purpose of the present argument, whoever were the authors of the histories.

These *four* circumstances;—first, the recognition of the account in its principal parts, by a series of succeeding writers; secondly, the total absence of any account of the origin of the religion substantially different from ours; thirdly, the early and extensive prevalence of rites and institutions which result from our account; fourthly, our account bearing, in its construction, proof that it is an account of facts which were known and believed at the time;—are sufficient, I conceive, to support an assurance, that the story which we have now, is, in general, the story which Christians had at the beginning. I say *in general*; by which term I mean, that it is the same in its texture, and in its principal facts. For instance, I make no doubt, for the reason above stated, but that the resurrection of the Founder of the religion was always a part of the Christian story. Nor can a doubt of this remain upon the mind of any one who reflects that the resurrection is, in some form or other, asserted, referred to, or assumed, in every Christian writing, of every description, which hath come down to us.

And if our evidence stopped here, we should have a strong case to offer; for we should have to allege, that in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, a certain number of persons set about an attempt of establishing a new religion in the world: in the prosecution of which purpose, they voluntarily encountered great dangers, undertook great labors, sustained great sufferings, *all* for a miraculous story, which they published wherever they came; and that the resurrection of a dead man, whom during his life they had followed and accompanied, was a constant part of the story. I know nothing in the above statement which can, with any appearance of reason, be disputed; and I know nothing, in the history of the human species, similar to it.

## CHAP. VIII.

*That it was in the main the Story which we have now proved, from the authority of our historical Scriptures.*

THAT the story which we have now is, in the main, the story which the apostles published, is, I think, nearly certain, from the considerations which have been proposed. But whether, when we come to the particulars, and the detail of the narrative, the historical books of the New Testament be deserving of credit as histories, so that a fact ought to be accounted true, because it is found in them; or whether they are entitled to be considered as representing the accounts, which, true or false, the apostles published;—whether their authority, in either of these views, can be trusted to, is a point

which necessarily depends upon what we know of the books, and of their authors.

Now, in treating of this part of our argument, the first and most material observation upon the subject is, that such was the situation of the authors to whom the four Gospels are ascribed, that, if any one of the four be genuine, it is sufficient for our purpose. The received author of the first was an original apostle and emissary of the religion. The received author of the second was an inhabitant of Jerusalem at the time, to whose house the apostles were wont to resort, and himself an attendant upon one of the most eminent of that number. The received author of the third, was a stated companion and fellow-traveller of the most active of all the teachers of the religion, and, in the course of his travels, frequently in the society of the original apostles. The received author of the fourth, as well as of the first, was one of these apostles. No stronger evidence of the truth of a history can arise from the situation of the historian, than what is here offered. The authors of all the histories lived at the time and upon the spot. The authors of two of the histories were present at many of the scenes which they describe; eye-witnesses of the facts, ear-witnesses of the discourses; writing from personal knowledge and recollection; and, what strengthens their testimony, writing upon a subject in which their minds were deeply engaged, and in which, as they must have been very frequently repeating the accounts to others, the passages of the history would be kept continually alive in their memory. Whoever reads the Gospels (and they ought to be read for this particular purpose), will find in them not merely a general affirmation of miraculous powers, but detailed circumstantial accounts of miracles, with specifications of time, place, and persons; and these accounts many and various. In the Gospels, therefore, which bear the names of Matthew and John, these narratives, if they really proceeded from these men, must either be true, as far as the fidelity of human recollection is usually to be depended upon, that is, must be true in substance, and in their principal parts (which is sufficient for the purpose of proving a supernatural agency), or they must be wilful and meditated falsehoods. Yet the writers who fabricated and utter these falsehoods, if they be such, are of the number of those, who unless the whole contexture of the Christian story be a dream, sacrificed their ease and safety in the cause and for a purpose the most inconsistent that is possible with dishonest intentions. They were villains for no end but to teach honesty, and martyrs without the least prospect of honor or advantage.

The Gospels which bear the names of Mark and Luke, although not the narratives of eye-witnesses, are, if genuine, removed from that only by one degree. They are the narratives of contemporary writers, of writers themselves mixing with the business; one of the two probably living in the place which was the principal scene of action; both living in habits of society and correspondence with those who had been present at the transactions which they relate. The latter of them accordingly tells us, (and with apparent sincerity,



because he tells it without pretending to personal knowledge, and without claiming for his work greater authority than belonged to it, that the things which were believed amongst Christians, came from those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; that he had traced accounts up to their source; and that he was prepared to instruct his reader in the certainty of the things which he related.\* Very few histories lie so close to their facts; very few historians are so nearly connected with the subject of their narrative, or possess such means of authentic information as these.

The situation of the writers applies to the *truth* of the facts which they record. But at present we use their testimony to a point somewhat short of this, namely, that the facts recorded in the Gospels, whether true or false, are the facts, and the sort of facts, which the original preachers of the religion alleged. Strictly speaking, I am concerned only to show, that what the Gospels contain is the same as what the apostles preached. Now, how stands the proof of this point? A set of men went about the world, publishing a story composed of miraculous accounts, (for miraculous from the very nature and exigency of the case they must have been,) and, upon the strength of these accounts, called upon mankind to quit the religions in which they had been educated, and to take up, thenceforth, a new system of opinions, and new rules of action. What is more in attestation of these accounts, that is, in support of an institution of which these accounts were the foundation, is, that the same men voluntarily exposed themselves to harassing and perpetual labors, dangers, and sufferings. We want to know what these accounts were. We have the particulars, *i. e.* many particulars, from two of their own number. We have them from an attendant of one of the number, and who, there is reason to believe, was an inhabitant of Jerusalem at the time. We have them from a fourth writer, who accompanied the most laborious missionary of the institution in his travels; who, in the course of these travels, was frequently brought into the society of the rest; and who, let it be observed, begins his narrative by telling us that he is about to relate the things which had been delivered by those who were ministers of the word, and eye-witnesses of the facts. I do not know what information can be more satisfactory than this. We may, perhaps, perceive the force and value of it more sensibly, if we reflect how *requiring* we should have been if we had wanted it. Supposing it to be sufficiently proved, that the religion now professed among us, owed its original to the preaching and ministry of a number of men, who, about eighteen centuries ago, set forth in the world a new system of religious opinions, founded upon certain extraordinary things which they related of a

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\* Why should not the candid and modest preface of this historian be believed, as well as that which Dion Cassius prefixes to his *Life of Commodus*? 'These things and the following I write not from the report of others, but from my own knowledge and observation.' I see no reason to doubt but that both passages describe truly enough the situation of the authors.

wonderful person who had appeared in Judea; suppose it to be also sufficiently proved, that, in the course and prosecution of their ministry, these men had subjected themselves to extreme hardships, fatigue, and peril; but suppose the accounts which they published had not been committed to writing till some ages after their times, or at least that no histories, but what had been composed some ages afterward, had reached our hands; we should have said, and with reason, that we were willing to believe these men under the circumstances in which they delivered their testimony, but that we did not, at this day, know with sufficient evidence what their testimony was. Had we received the particulars of it from any of their own number, from any of those who lived and conversed with them, from any of their hearers, or even from any of their contemporaries, we should have had something to rely upon. Now, if our books be genuine, we have all these. We have the very species of information which, as it appears to me, our imagination would have carved out for us, if it had been wanting.

But I have said, that, if *any one* of the four Gospels be genuine, we have not only direct historical testimony to the point we contend for, but testimony which, so far as that point is concerned, cannot reasonably be rejected. If the first Gospel was really written by Matthew, we have the narrative of one of the number, from which to judge what were the miracles, and the kind of miracles, which the apostles attributed to Jesus. Although, for argument's sake, and only for argument's sake, we should allow that this Gospel had been erroneously ascribed to Matthew; yet, if the Gospel of Saint John be genuine, the observation holds with no less strength. Again, although the Gospels both of Matthew and John could be supposed to be spurious, yet, if the Gospel of Saint Luke were truly the composition of that person, or of any person, be his name what it might, who was actually in the situation in which the author of that Gospel professes himself to have been, or if the Gospel which bears the name of Mark really proceeded from him; we still, even upon the lowest supposition, possess the accounts of one writer at least, who was not only contemporary with the apostles, but associated with them in their ministry; which authority seems sufficient, when the question is simply what it was which these apostles advanced.

I think it material to have this well noticed. The New Testament contains a great number of distinct writings, the genuineness of any one of which is almost sufficient to prove the truth of the religion: it contains, however, four distinct histories, the genuineness of any one of which is perfectly sufficient. If, therefore, we must be considered as encountering the risk of error in assigning the authors of our books, we are entitled to the advantage of so many separate probabilities. And although it should appear that some of the evangelists had seen and used each other's works, this discovery, whilst it subtracts indeed from their characters as testimonies strictly independent, diminishes, I conceive, little, either their separate authority (by which I mean the authority of any one

that is genuine), or their mutual confirmation. For, let the most disadvantageous supposition possible be made concerning them; let it be allowed, what I should have no great difficulty in admitting, that Mark compiled his history almost entirely from those of Matthew and Luke; and let it also for a moment be supposed that these histories were not, in fact, written by Matthew and Luke; yet, if it be true that Mark, a contemporary of the apostles, living in habits of society with the apostles, a fellow-traveller and fellow-laborer with some of them; if, I say, it be true that this person made the compilation, it follows, that the writings from which he made it existed in the time of the apostles, and not only so, but that they were then in such esteem and credit, that a companion of the apostles formed a history out of them. Let the Gospel of Mark be called an epitome of that of Matthew; if a person in the situation in which Mark is described to have been, actually made the epitome, it affords the strongest possible attestation to the character of the original.

Again, parallelisms in sentences, in words, and in the order of words, have been traced out between the Gospel of Matthew and that of Luke; which concurrence cannot easily be explained otherwise than by supposing, either that Luke had consulted Matthew's history, or, what appears to me in nowise incredible, that minutes of some of Christ's discourses, as well as brief memoirs of some passages of his life, had been committed to writing at the time; and that such written accounts had by both authors been occasionally admitted into their histories. Either supposition is perfectly consistent with the acknowledged formation of Saint Luke's narrative, who professes not to write as an eye-witness, but to have investigated the original of every account which he delivers; in other words, to have collected them from such documents and testimonies, as he, who had the best opportunities of making inquiries, judged to be authentic. Therefore, allowing that this writer also, in some instances, borrowed from the Gospel which we call Matthew's, and once more allowing, for the sake of stating the argument, that that Gospel was not the production of the author to whom we ascribe it; yet still we have, in Saint Luke's Gospel, a history given by a writer immediately connected with the transaction, with the witnesses of it, with the persons engaged in it, and composed from materials which that person, thus situated, deemed to be safe sources of intelligence; in other words, whatever supposition be made concerning any or all the other Gospels, if Saint Luke's Gospel be genuine, we have in it a credible evidence of the point which we maintain.

The Gospel according to Saint John appears to be, and is on all hands allowed to be, an independent testimony, strictly and properly so called. Notwithstanding, therefore, any connexion, or supposed connexion, between some of the Gospels, I again repeat what I before said, that if any one of the four be genuine, we have, in that one, strong reason, from the character and situation of the writer, to believe that we possess the accounts which the original emissaries of the religion delivered.

Secondly: In treating of the written evidences of Christianity,

next to their separate, we are to consider their aggregate authority. Now, there is in the evangelic history a cumulation of testimony which belongs hardly to any other history, but which our habitual mode of reading the Scriptures sometimes causes us to overlook. When a passage, in any wise relating to the history of Christ, is read to us out of the epistle of Clemens Romanus, the epistle of Ignatius, of Polycarp, or from any other writing of that age, we are immediately sensible of the confirmation which it affords to the Scripture account. Here is a new witness. Now, if we had been accustomed to read the Gospel of Matthew alone, and had known that of Luke only as the generality of Christians know the writings of the apostolic fathers, that is, had known that such a writing was extant and acknowledged; when we came, for the first time, to look into what it contained, and found many of the facts which Matthew recorded, recorded also there, many other facts of a similar nature added, and throughout the whole work the same general series of transactions stated, and the same general character of the person who was the subject of the history preserved, I apprehend that we should feel our minds strongly impressed by this discovery of fresh evidence. We should feel a renewal of the same sentiment in first reading the Gospel of Saint John. That of Saint Mark perhaps would strike us as an abridgment of the history with which we were already acquainted; but we should naturally reflect, that if that history was abridged by such a person as Mark, or by any person of so early an age, it afforded one of the highest possible attestations to the value of the work. This successive disclosure of proof would leave us assured, that there must have been at least some reality in a story which not one, but many, had taken in hand to commit to writing. The very existence of four separate histories would satisfy us that the subject had a foundation; and when, amidst the variety which the different information of the different writers had supplied to their accounts, or which their different choice and judgment in selecting their materials had produced, we observed many facts to stand the same in all; of these facts, at least, we should conclude, that they were fixed in their credit and publicity. If, after this, we should come to the knowledge of a distinct history, and that also of the same age with the rest, taking up the subject where the others had left it, and carrying on a narrative of the effects produced in the world by the extraordinary causes of which we had already been informed, and which effects subsist at this day, we should think the reality of the original story in no little degree established by this supplement. If subsequent inquiries should bring to our knowledge, one after another, letters written by some of the principal agents in the business, upon the business, and during the time of their activity and concern in it, assuming all along and recognizing the original story, agitating the questions that arose out of it, pressing the obligations which resulted from it, giving advice and directions to those who acted upon it; I conceive that we should find, in every one of these, a still farther support to the conclusion we had formed. At present, the weight of this successive confirmation is, in a great

measure, unperceived by us. The evidence does not appear to us what it is; for, being from our infancy accustomed to regard the New Testament as one book, we see in it only one testimony. The whole occurs to us as a single evidence; and its different parts, not as distinct attestations, but as different portions only of the same. Yet in this conception of the subject, we are certainly mistaken: for the very discrepancies among the several documents which form our volume, prove, if all other proof were wanting, that in their original composition they were separate, and most of them independent productions.

If we dispose our ideas in a different order, the matter stands thus: Whilst the transaction was recent, and the original witnesses were at hand to relate it; and whilst the apostles were busied in preaching and travelling, in collecting disciples, in forming and regulating societies of converts, in supporting themselves against opposition; whilst they exercised their ministry under the harassings of frequent persecution, and in a state of almost continual alarm, it is not probable that, in this engaged, anxious, and unsettled condition of life, they would think immediately of writing histories for the information of the public or of posterity.\* But it is very probable that emergencies might draw from some of them occasional letters upon the subject of their mission, to converts, or to societies of converts, with which they were connected; or that they might address written discourses and exhortations to the disciples of the institution at large, which would be received and read with a respect proportioned to the character of the writer. Accounts in the mean time would get abroad of the extraordinary things that had been passing, written with different degrees of information and correctness. The extension of the Christian society, which could no longer be instructed by a personal intercourse with the apostles, and the possible circulation of imperfect or erroneous narratives, would soon teach some amongst them the expediency of sending forth authentic memoirs of the life and doctrine of their Master. When accounts appeared authorized by the name, and credit, and situation, of the writers, recommended or recognized by the apostles and first preachers of the religion, or found to coincide with what the apostles and first preachers of the religion had taught, other accounts would fall into disuse and neglect; whilst these, maintaining their reputation (as, if genuine and well founded, they would do) under the test of time, inquiry, and contradiction, might be expected to make their way into the hands of Christians of all countries of the world.

This seems the natural progress of the business; and with this the records in our possession, and the evidence concerning them,

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\* This thought occurred to Eusebius: 'Nor were the apostles of Christ greatly concerned about the writing of books, being engaged in a more excellent ministry, which is above all human power.' *Eccles. Hist.* l. iii. c. 24.—The same consideration accounts also for the paucity of Christian writings in the first century of its era.

correspond. We have remaining, in the first place, many letters of the kind above described, which have been preserved with a care and fidelity answering to the respect with which we may suppose such letters would be received. But as these letters were not written to prove the truth of the Christian religion, in the sense in which we regard that question; nor to convey information of facts, of which those to whom the letters were written had been previously informed; we are not to look in them for any thing more than incidental allusions to the Christian history. We are able, however, to gather from these documents various particular attestations which have been already enumerated; and this is a species of written evidence, as far as it goes, in the highest degree satisfactory, and in point of time perhaps the first. But for our more circumstantial information, we have, in the next place, five direct *histories*, bearing the names of persons acquainted, by their situation, with the truth of what they relate, and three of them purporting, in the very body of the narrative, to be written by such persons; of which books we know, that some were in the hands of those who were contemporaries of the apostles, and that, in the age immediately posterior to that, they were in the hands, we may say, of every one, and received by Christians with so much respect and deference, as to be constantly quoted and referred to by them, without any doubt of the truth of their accounts. They were treated as such histories, proceeding from such authorities, might expect to be treated. In the preface to one of our histories, we have intimation left us of the existence of some ancient accounts which are now lost. There is nothing in this circumstance that can surprise us. It was to be expected, from the magnitude and novelty of the occasion, that such accounts would swarm. When better accounts came forth, these died away. Our present histories superseded others. They soon acquired a character and established a reputation which does not appear to have belonged to any other: that, at least, can be proved concerning them, which cannot be proved concerning any other.

But to return to the point which led to these reflections. By considering our records in either of the two views in which we have represented them, we shall perceive that we possess a *collection of proofs*, and not a naked or solitary testimony; and that the written evidence is of such a kind, and comes to us in such a state, as the natural order and progress of things, in the infancy of the institution, might be expected to produce.

Thirdly: The genuineness of the historical books of the New Testament is undoubtedly a point of importance, because the strength of their evidence is augmented by our knowledge of the situation of their authors, their relation to the subject, and the part which they sustained in the transaction; and the testimonies which we are able to produce, compose a firm ground of persuasion, that the Gospels were written by the persons whose names they bear. Nevertheless, I must be allowed to state, that to the argument which I am endeavoring to maintain, this point is not essential; I mean, so

essential as that the fate of the argument depends upon it. The question before us is, whether the Gospels exhibit the story which the apostles and first emissaries of the religion published, and *for* which they acted and suffered in the manner in which, for some miraculous story or other, they did act and suffer. Now let us suppose that we possessed no other information concerning these books than that they were written by early disciples of Christianity; that they were known and read during the time, or near the time, of the original apostles of the religion; that by Christians whom the apostles instructed, by societies of Christians which the apostles founded, these books were *received* (by which term 'received,' I mean that they were believed to contain authentic accounts of the transactions upon which the religion rested, and accounts which were accordingly used, repeated, and relied upon), this reception would be a valid proof that these books, whoever were the authors of them, must have accorded with what the apostles taught. A reception by the first race of Christians, is evidence that they agreed with what the first teachers of the religion delivered. In particular, if they had not agreed with what the apostles themselves preached, how could they have gained credit in churches and societies which the apostles established?

Now the fact of the early existence, and not only of their existence but their reputation, is made out by some ancient testimonies which do not happen to specify the names of the writers: add to which, what hath been already hinted, that two out of the four Gospels contain averments in the body of the history, which, though they do not disclose the names, fix the time and situation of the authors, viz. that one was written by an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ, the other by a contemporary of the apostles. In the Gospel of St. John, (xix. 35.) after describing the crucifixion, with the particular circumstance of piercing Christ's side with a spear, the historian adds, as for himself, 'and he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.' Again, (xxi. 24.) after relating a conversation which passed between Peter and 'the disciple,' as it is there expressed, 'whom Jesus loved,' it is added, 'this is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things.' This testimony, let it be remarked, is not less worthy of regard, because it is, in one view, imperfect. The name is not mentioned; which, if a fraudulent purpose had been intended, would have been done. The third of our present Gospels purports to have been written by the person who wrote the Acts of the Apostles; in which latter history, or rather latter part of the same history, the author, by using in various places the first personal plural, declares himself to have been a contemporary of all, and a companion of one, of the original preachers of the religion.

## CHAP. IX.

*Of the Authenticity of the Historical Scriptures, in Eleven Sections.*

NOT forgetting, therefore, what credit is due to the evangelical history, supposing even any one of the four Gospels to be genuine; what credit is due to the Gospels, even supposing nothing to be known concerning them but that they were written by early disciples of the religion, and received with deference by early Christian churches; more especially not forgetting what credit is due to the New Testament in its capacity of *cumulative* evidence; we now proceed to state the proper and distinct proofs, which show not only the general value of these records, but their specific authority, and the high probability there is that they actually came from the persons whose names they bear.

There are, however, a few preliminary reflections, by which we may draw up with more regularity to the propositions upon which the close and particular discussion of the subject depends. Of which nature are the following:

I. We are able to produce a great number of ancient *manuscripts*, found in many different countries, and in countries widely distant from each other, all of them anterior to the art of printing, some certainly seven or eight hundred years old, and some which have been preserved probably above a thousand years.\* We have also many ancient *versions* of these books, and some of them into languages which are not at present, nor for many ages have been, spoken in any part of the world. The existence of these manuscripts and versions proves that the Scriptures were not the production of any modern contrivance. It does away also the uncertainty which hangs over such publications as the works, real or pretended, of Ossian and Rowley, in which the editors are challenged to produce their manuscripts, and to show where they obtained their copies. The number of manuscripts, far exceeding those of any other book, and their wide dispersion, afford an argument, in some measure, to the senses, that the Scriptures anciently, in like manner as at this day, were more read and sought after than any other books, and that also in many different countries. The greatest part of spurious Christian writings are utterly lost, the rest preserved by some single manuscript. There is weight also in Dr. Bentley's observation, that the New Testament has suffered less injury by the errors of transcribers, than the works of any profane author of the same size and antiquity; that is, there never was any writing, in the preservation and purity of which the world was so interested or so careful.

II. An argument of great weight with those who are judges of the proofs upon which it is founded, and capable, through their tes-

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\* The Alexandrian Manuscript, now in the British Museum, was written probably in the fourth or fifth century.



timony, of being addressed to every understanding, is that which arises from the style and language of the New Testament. It is just such a language as might be expected from the apostles, from persons of their age and in their situation, and from no other persons. It is the style neither of classic authors, nor of the ancient Christian fathers, but Greek coming from men of Hebrew origin; abounding, that is, with Hebraic and Syriac idioms, such as would naturally be found in the writings of men who used a language spoken indeed where they lived, but not the common dialect of the country. This happy peculiarity is a strong proof of the genuineness of these writings: for who should forge them? The Christian fathers were for the most part totally ignorant of Hebrew, and therefore were not likely to insert Hebraisms and Syriasms into their writings. The few who had a knowledge of the Hebrew, as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Epiphanius, wrote in a language which bears no resemblance to that of the New Testament. The Nazarenes, who understood Hebrew, used chiefly, perhaps almost entirely, the Gospel of Saint Matthew, and therefore cannot be suspected of forging the rest of the sacred writings. The argument, at any rate, proves the antiquity of these books; that they belonged to the age of the apostles; that they could be composed indeed in no other.\*

III. Why should we question the genuineness of these books? Is it for that they contain accounts of supernatural events? I apprehend that this, at the bottom, is the real, though secret, cause of our hesitation about them; for, had the writings inscribed with the names of Matthew and John, related nothing but ordinary history, there would have been no more doubt whether these writings were theirs, than there is concerning the acknowledged works of Josephus or Philo; that is, there would have been no doubt at all. Now it ought to be considered that this reason, however it may apply to the credit which is given to a writer's judgment or veracity, affects the question of genuineness very indirectly. The works of Bede exhibit many wonderful relations: but who, for that reason, doubts that they were written by Bede? The same of a multitude of other authors. To which may be added, that we ask no more for our books than what we allow to other books in some sort similar to ours: we do not deny the genuineness of the Koran; we admit that the history of Apollonius Tyanæus, purporting to be written by Philostratus, was really written by Philostratus.

IV. If it had been an easy thing in the early times of the institution to have forged Christian writings, and to have obtained currency and reception to the forgeries, we should have had many appearing in the name of Christ himself. No writings would have been received with so much avidity and respect as these: consequently none afforded so great temptation to forgery. Yet have we

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\* See this argument stated more at large in Michaelis's Introduction (Marsh's translation,) vol. i. c. ii. sect. 10. from which these observations are taken.

heard but of one attempt of this sort, deserving of the smallest notice, *that* in a piece of a very few lines, and so far from succeeding, I mean, from obtaining acceptance and reputation, or an acceptance and reputation in any wise similar to that which can be proved to have attended the books of the New Testament, that it is not so much as mentioned by any writer of the first three centuries. The learned reader need not be informed that I mean the epistle of Christ to Abgarus, king of Edessa, found at present in the work of Eusebius,\* as a piece acknowledged by him, though not without considerable doubt whether the whole passage be not an interpolation; as it is most certain, that, after the publication of Eusebius's work, this epistle was universally rejected.†

V. If the ascription of the Gospels to their respective authors had been arbitrary or conjectural, they would have been ascribed to more eminent men. This observation holds concerning the first three Gospels, the reputed authors of which were enabled, by their situation, to obtain true intelligence, and were likely to deliver an honest account of what they knew, but were persons not distinguished in the history by extraordinary marks of notice or commendation. Of the apostles, I hardly know any one of whom less is said than Matthew, or of whom the little that is said, is less calculated to magnify his character. Of Mark, nothing is said in the Gospels; and what is said of any person of that name in the Acts, and in the Epistles, in no part bestows praise or eminence upon him. The name of Luke is mentioned only in St. Paul's Epistle,‡ and very transiently. The judgment, therefore, which assigned these writings to these authors proceeded, it may be presumed, upon proper knowledge and evidence, and not upon a voluntary choice of names.

VI. Christian writers and Christian churches appear to have soon arrived at a very general agreement upon the subject, and that without the interposition of any public authority. When the diversity of opinion, which prevailed, and prevails among Christians in other points, is considered, their concurrence in the canon of Scripture is remarkable, and of great weight, especially as it seems to have been the result of private and free inquiry. We have no knowledge of any interference of authority in the question, before the council of Laodicea in the year 363. Probably the decree of

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\* Hist. Eccl. lib. i. c. 15.

† Augustin, A. D. 895, (De Consens. Evang. c. 34.) had *heard* that the Pagans pretended to be possessed of an epistle from Christ to Peter and Paul; but he had never seen it, and appears to doubt of the existence of any such piece, either genuine or spurious. No other ancient writer mentions it. He also, and he alone, notices, and that in order to condemn it, an epistle ascribed to Christ by the Manichees, A. D. 270, and a short hymn attributed to him by the Priscillianists, A. D. 378. (cont. Faust. Man. lib. xxviii. c. 4.) The lateness of the writer who notices these things, the manner in which he notices them, and, above all, the silence of every preceding writer, render them unworthy of consideration.

‡ Col. iv. 14. 2 Tim. iv. 11. Philem. 24.

this council rather declared than regulated the public judgment, or, more properly speaking, the judgment of some neighboring churches; the council itself consisting of no more than thirty or forty bishops of Lydia and the adjoining countries.\* Nor does its authority seem to have extended farther; for we find numerous Christian writers, after this time, discussing the question, 'What books were entitled to be received as Scripture,' with great freedom, upon proper grounds of evidence, and without any reference to the decision at Laodicea.

THESE considerations are not to be neglected: but of an argument concerning the genuineness of ancient writings, the substance, undoubtedly, and strength, is ancient testimony.

This testimony it is necessary to exhibit somewhat in detail: for when Christian advocates merely tell us that we have the same reason for believing the Gospels to be written by the evangelists whose names they bear, as we have for believing the Commentaries to be Cæsar's, the *Æneid* Virgil's, or the Orations Cicero's, they content themselves with an imperfect representation. They state nothing more than what is true, but they do not state the truth correctly. In the number, variety, and early date of our testimonies, we far exceed all other ancient books. For one, which the most celebrated work of the most celebrated Greek or Roman writer can allege, we produce many. But then it is more requisite in our books, than in theirs, to separate and distinguish them from spurious competitors. The result, I am convinced, will be satisfactory to every fair inquirer: but this circumstance renders an inquiry necessary.

In a work, however, like the present, there is a difficulty in finding a place for evidence of this kind. To pursue the details of proofs throughout, would be to transcribe a great part of Dr. Lardner's eleven octavo volumes: to leave the argument without proofs, is to leave it without effect; for the persuasion produced by this species of evidence depends upon a view and introduction of the particulars which compose it.

The method which I propose to myself is, first, to place before the reader, in one view, the propositions which comprise the several heads of our testimony, and afterward to repeat the same propositions in so many distinct sections, with the necessary authorities subjoined to each.†

The following, then, are the allegations upon the subject, which are capable of being established by proof:—

I. That the historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of Christian writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the apostles, or who immediately

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\* Lardner, *Cred.* vol. viii. p. 291, &c.

† The reader, when he has the propositions before him, will observe that the argument, if he should omit the sections, proceeds connectedly from this point.

followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

II. That when they are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted or alluded to with peculiar respect, as books *sui generis*; as possessing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians.

III. That they were, in very early times, collected into a distinct volume.

IV. That they were distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect.

V. That they were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians.

VI. That commentaries were written upon them, harmonies formed out of them, different copies carefully collated, and versions of them made into different languages.

VII. That they were received by Christians of different sects, by many heretics as well as Catholics, and usually appealed to by both sides in the controversies which arose in those days.

VIII. That the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of Saint Paul, the first Epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received, without doubt, by those who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our present canon.

IX. That the Gospels were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as books containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.

X. That formal catalogues of authentic Scriptures were published; in all which our present sacred histories were included.

XI. That these propositions cannot be affirmed of any other books claiming to be books of Scripture; by which are meant those books which are commonly called apocryphal books of the New Testament.

## SECT. I.

*The historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, are quoted, or alluded to by a series of Christian writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the apostles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.*

THE medium of proof stated in this proposition is, of all others, the most unquestionable, the least liable to any practices of fraud, and is not diminished by the lapse of ages. Bishop Burnet, in the History of his Own Times, inserts various extracts from lord Clarendon's History. One such insertion is a proof, that lord Clarendon's History was extant at the time when bishop Burnet wrote, that it had been read by bishop Burnet, that it was received by bishop Burnet as a work of lord Clarendon, and also regarded by him as an authentic account of the transactions which it relates; and it will be a proof of these points a thousand years hence, or as long as the

books exist. Quintilian having quoted as Cicero's\* that well-known trait of dissembled vanity;—

'Si quid est in me ingenii, Judices, quod sentio quam sit exiguum;'—the quotation would be strong evidence, were there any doubt, that the oration, which opens with this address, actually came from Cicero's pen. These instances, however simple, may serve to point out to a reader, who is little accustomed to such researches, the nature and value of the argument.

The testimonies which we have to bring forward under this proposition are the following :

I. There is extant an epistle ascribed to Barnabas,† the companion of Paul. It is quoted as the epistle of Barnabas, by Clement of Alexandria, A. D. CXCIV; by Origen, A. D. CCXXX. It is mentioned by Eusebius, A. D. CCCXV, and by Jerome, A. D. CCCXCII, as an ancient work in their time, bearing the name of Barnabas, and as well known and read amongst Christians, though not accounted a part of Scripture. It purports to have been written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, during the calamities which followed that disaster; and it bears the character of the age to which it professes to belong.

In this epistle appears the following remarkable passage :—'Let us, therefore, beware lest it come upon us, *as it is written*; There are many called, few chosen.' From the expression, '*as it is written*,' we infer with certainty, that, at the time when the author of this epistle lived, there was a book extant, well known to Christians, and of authority amongst them, containing these words :—'Many are called, few chosen.' Such a book is our present Gospel of Saint Matthew, in which this text is twice found,‡ and is found in no other book now known. There is a farther observation to be made upon the terms of the quotation. The writer of the epistle was a Jew. The phrase '*it is written*,' was the very form in which the Jews quoted their Scriptures. It is not probable, therefore, that he would have used this phrase, and without qualification, of any books but what had acquired a kind of scriptural authority. If the passage remarked in this ancient writing had been found in one of St. Paul's Epistles, it would have been esteemed by every one a high testimony to St. Matthew's Gospel. It ought, therefore, to be remembered, that the writing in which it is found was probably by very few years posterior to those of St. Paul.

Beside this passage, there are also in the epistle before us, several others, in which the sentiment is the same with what we meet with in St. Matthew's Gospel, and two or three in which we recognize the same words. In particular, the author of the epistle repeats the

\* Quint. lib. xi. c. i.

† Lardner, Cred. edit. 1755, vol. i. p. 23, &c. The reader will observe from the references, that the materials of these sections are almost entirely extracted from Dr. Lardner's work;—my office consisted in arrangement and selection.

‡ Matt. xx. 16. xxii. 14.

precept, 'Give to every one that asketh thee;\*' and saith that Christ chose as his apostles, who were to preach the Gospel, men who were great sinners, that he might show that he came 'not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.†

II. We are in possession of an epistle written by Clement, bishop of Rome,‡ whom ancient writers, without any doubt or scruple, assert to have been the Clement whom Saint Paul mentions, Phil. iv. 3.; 'with *Clement* also, and other my fellow-laborers, whose names are in the book of life.' This epistle is spoken of by the ancients as an epistle acknowledged by all; and, as Irenæus well represents its value, 'written by Clement, who had seen the blessed apostles, and conversed with them; who had the preaching of the apostles still sounding in his ears, and their traditions before his eyes.' It is addressed to the church of Corinth; and what alone may seem almost decisive of its authenticity, Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, about the year 170, *i. e.* about eighty or ninety years after the epistle was written, bears witness, 'that it had been wont to be read in that church from ancient times.'

This epistle affords, amongst others, the following valuable passages:—'Especially remembering the words of the Lord Jesus which he spake, teaching gentleness and long-suffering: for thus he said:§ "Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; forgive, that it may be forgiven unto you; as you do, so shall it be done unto you; as you give, so shall it be given unto you; as ye judge, so shall ye be judged; as ye show kindness, so shall kindness be shown unto you: with what measure ye mete, with the same shall it be measured to you." By this command, and by these rules, let us establish ourselves, that ye may always walk obediently to his holy words.'

Again; 'Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, for he said, "Woe to that man by whom offences come; it were better for him that he had not been born, than that he should offend one of my elect; it were better for him that a millstone should be tied about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the sea, than that he should offend one of my little ones." ¶

In both these passages, we perceive the high respect paid to the words of Christ as recorded by the evangelists; '*Remember the*

\* Matt. v. 42. † Matt. ix. 13. ‡ Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 62, &c.

§ 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' Matt. v. 7. — 'Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you.' Luke vi. 37, 38. — 'Judge not, that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.' Matt. vii. 1, 2.

¶ Matt. xviii. 6. 'But whoso shall offend one of those little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea.' The latter part of the passage in Clement agrees more exactly with Luke xvii. 2: 'It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.'

words of the Lord Jesus;—by this command, and by these rules, let us establish ourselves, that we may always walk obediently to his holy words.' We perceive also in Clement a total unconsciousness of doubt, whether these were the real words of Christ, which are read as such in the Gospels. This observation indeed belongs to the whole series of testimony, and especially to the most ancient part of it. Whenever any thing now read in the Gospels, is met with in an early Christian writing, it is always observed to stand there as acknowledged truth, *i. e.* to be introduced without hesitation, doubt, or apology. It is to be observed also, that as this epistle was written in the name of the church of Rome, and addressed to the church of Corinth, it ought to be taken as exhibiting the judgment not only of Clement, who drew up the letter, but of these churches themselves, at least as to the authority of the books referred to.

It may be said, that, as Clement has not used words of quotation, it is not certain that he refers to any book whatever. The words of Christ, which he has put down, he might himself have heard from the apostles, or might have received through the ordinary medium of oral tradition. This has been said: but that no such inference can be drawn from the absence of words of quotation, is proved by the three following considerations:—First, that Clement, in the very same manner, namely, without any mark of reference, uses a passage now found in the Epistle to the Romans;\* which passage, from the peculiarity of the words which compose it, and from their order, it is manifest that he must have taken from the book. The same remark may be repeated of some very singular sentiments in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Secondly, that there are many sentences of Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians standing in Clement's epistle without any sign of quotation, which yet certainly are quotations; because it appears that Clement had Saint Paul's epistle before him, inasmuch as in one place he mentions it in terms too express to leave us in any doubt:—'Take into your hands the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul.' Thirdly, that this method of adopting words of Scripture without reference to acknowledgment, was, as will appear in the sequel, a method in general use amongst the most ancient Christian writers. These analogies not only repel the objection, but cast the presumption on the other side, and afford a considerable degree of positive proof, that the words in question have been borrowed from the places of Scripture in which we now find them.

But take it if you will the other way, that Clement had heard these words from the apostles or first teachers of Christianity; with respect to the precise point of our argument, *viz.* that the Scriptures contain what the apostles taught, this supposition may serve almost as well.

III. Near the conclusion of the Epistle to the Romans, Saint Paul,

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\* Romans i. 29.

amongst others, sends the following salutation: 'Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, *Hermas*, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.'

Of *Hermas*, who appears in this catalogue of Roman Christians as contemporary with Saint Paul, a book bearing the name, and it is most probable rightly, is still remaining. It is called the Shepherd\* or Pastor of *Hermas*. Its antiquity is incontestable, from the quotations of it in Irenæus, A. D. 178; Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194; Tertullian, A. D. 200; Origen, A. D. 230. The notes of time extant in the epistle itself, agree with its title, and with the testimonies concerning it, for it purports to have been written during the lifetime of Clement.

In this piece are tacit allusions to Saint Matthew's, Saint Luke's, and Saint John's Gospels; that is to say, there are applications of thoughts and expressions found in these Gospels, without citing the place or writer from which they were taken. In this form appear in *Hermas* the confessing and denying of Christ;† the parable of the seed sown;‡ the comparison of Christ's disciples to little children; the saying, 'He that putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery;§' the singular expression, 'having received all power from his Father,' in probable allusion to Matt. xxviii. 18; and Christ being the 'gate,' or only way of coming 'to God,' in plain allusion to John xiv. 6. x. 7. 9. There is also a probable allusion to Acts v. 32.

This piece is the representation of a vision, and has by many been accounted a weak and fanciful performance. I therefore observe, that the character of the writing has little to do with the purpose for which we adduce it. It is the age in which it was composed, that gives the value to its testimony.

IV. Ignatius, as it is testified by ancient Christian writers, became bishop of Antioch about thirty-seven years after Christ's ascension; and therefore, from his time, and place, and station, it is probable that he had known and conversed with many of the apostles. Epistles of Ignatius are referred to by Polycarp, his contemporary. Passages found in the epistles now extant under his name, are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178; by Origen, A. D. 230; and the occasion of writing the epistles is given at large by Eusebius and Jerome. What are called the smaller epistles of Ignatius, are generally deemed to be those which were read by Irenæus, Origen, and Eusebius.||

In these epistles are various undoubted allusions to the Gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint John; yet so far of the same form with those in the preceding articles, that, like them, they are not accompanied with marks of quotation.

Of these allusions the following are clear specimens:

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 111.

† Matt. x. 32, 33. or, Luke xii. 8, 9.

‡ Matt. xiii. 3. or, Luke viii. 5.

§ Luke xvi. 18.

|| Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 147.



- Matt.\* { 'Christ was baptized of John, that *all righteousness might be fulfilled by him.*'  
 'Be ye wise as serpents in all things, and harmless as a dove.'
- John.† { 'Yet the Spirit is not deceived, being from God: for it knows *whence it comes, and whither it goes.*'  
 'He (Christ) is the *door* of the Father, by which *enter in* Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the apostles, and the church.'

As to the manner of quotation, this is observable:—Ignatius, in one place, speaks of Saint Paul in terms of high respect, and quotes his Epistle to the Ephesians by *name*; yet, in several other places, he borrows words and sentiments from the same epistle without mentioning it; which shows, that this was his general manner of using and applying writings then extant, and then of high authority.

V. Polycarp† had been taught by the apostles; had conversed with many who had seen Christ; was also by the apostles appointed bishop of Smyrna. This testimony concerning Polycarp is given by Irenæus, who in his youth had seen him:—'I can tell the place (saith Irenæus) in which the blessed Polycarp sat and taught, and his going out and coming in, and the manner of his life, and the form of his person, and the discourses he made to the people, and how he related his conversation with John, and others who had seen the Lord, and how he related their sayings, and what he had heard concerning the Lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrine, as he had received them from the eye-witnesses of the Word of life; all which Polycarp related agreeable to the Scriptures.'

Of Polycarp, whose proximity to the age and country and persons of the apostles is thus attested, we have one undoubted epistle remaining. And this, though a short letter, contains nearly forty clear allusions to the books of the New Testament; which is strong evidence of the respect which Christians of that age bore for these books.

Amongst these, although the writings of Saint Paul are more frequently used by Polycarp than any other parts of Scripture, there are copious allusions to the Gospel of Saint Matthew, some to passages found in the Gospels both of Matthew and Luke, and some which more nearly resemble the words in Luke.

I select the following, as fixing the authority of the Lord's prayer, and the use of it amongst the primitive Christians: 'If therefore we pray the Lord, that *he will forgive us, we ought also to forgive.*'

'With supplication beseeching the all-seeing God *not to lead us into temptation.*'

\* Chap. iii. 15. 'For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.'—Chap. x. 16. 'Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.'

† Chap. iii. 8. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell *whence it cometh and whither it goeth*; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'

Chap. x. 9. 'I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.'

‡ Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 192.

And the following, for the sake of repeating an observation already made, that words of our Lord, found in our Gospels, were at this early day quoted as spoken by him; and not only so, but quoted with so little question or consciousness of doubt about their being really his words, as not even to mention, much less to canvass, the authority from which they were taken:

“But remembering what the Lord said, teaching, Judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”\*

Supposing Polycarp to have had these words from the books in which we now find them, it is manifest that these books were considered by him, and, as he thought, considered by his readers, as authentic accounts of Christ’s discourses: and that that point was incontestable.

The following is a decisive, though what we call a tacit, reference to Saint Peter’s speech in the Acts of the Apostles:—‘whom God hath raised, having loosed the pains of death.’†

VI. Papias,‡ a hearer of John, and companion of Polycarp, as Irenæus attests, and of that age, as all agree, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, from a work now lost, expressly ascribes the respective Gospels to Matthew and Mark; and in a manner which proves that these Gospels must have publicly borne the names of these authors at that time, and probably long before; for Papias does not say that one Gospel was written by Matthew, and another by Mark; but, assuming this as perfectly well known, he tells us from what materials Mark collected his account, viz. from Peter’s preaching, and in what language Matthew wrote, viz. in Hebrew. Whether Papias was well informed in this statement, or not; to the point for which I produce this testimony, namely, that these books bore these names at this time, his authority is complete.

The writers hitherto alleged, had all lived and conversed with some of the apostles. The works of theirs which remain, are in general very short pieces, yet rendered extremely valuable by their antiquity; and none, short as they are, but what contain some important testimony to our historical Scriptures.§

\* Matt. vii. 1, 2. v. 7; Luke vi. 37, 38.

† Acts ii. 24.

‡ Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 239.

§ That the quotations are more thinly strown in these, than in the writings of the next and of succeeding ages, is in a good measure accounted for by the observation, that the Scriptures of the New Testament had not yet, nor by their recency hardly could have, become a general part of Christian education; read as the Old Testament was by the Jews and Christians from their childhood, and thereby intimately mixing, as that had long done, with all their religious ideas, and with their language upon religious subjects. In process of time, and as soon perhaps as could be expected, this came to be the case. And then we perceive the effect, in a proportionably greater frequency, as well as copiousness, of allusion.¶

¶ Mich. Introd. c. ii. sect. vi.

VII. Not long after these, that is, not much more than twenty years after the last, follows Justin Martyr.\* His remaining works are much larger than any that have yet been noticed. Although the nature of his two principal writings, one of which was addressed to heathens, and the other was a conference with a Jew, did not lead him to such frequent appeals to Christian books as would have appeared in a discourse intended for Christian readers; we nevertheless reckon up in them between twenty and thirty quotations of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, certain, distinct, and copious: if each verse be counted separately, a much greater number; if each expression, a very great one.†

We meet with quotations of three of the Gospels within the compass of half a page: 'And in other words he says, Depart from me into outer darkness, which the Father hath prepared for Satan and his angels,' (which is from Matthew xxv. 41.) 'And again he said in other words, I give unto you power to tread upon serpents, and scorpions, and venomous beasts, and upon all the power of the enemy.' (This from Luke x. 19.) 'And before he was crucified, he said, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the Scribes and Pharisees, and be crucified, and rise again on the third day.' (This from Mark viii. 31.)

In another place, Justin quotes a passage in the history of Christ's birth, as delivered by Matthew and John, and fortifies his quotation by this remarkable testimony: 'As they have taught, who have written the history of all things concerning our Saviour Jesus Christ: and we believe them.'

Quotations are also found from the Gospel of Saint John.

What, moreover, seems extremely material to be observed is, that in all Justin's works, from which might be extracted almost a complete life of Christ, there are but two instances, in which he refers to any thing as said or done by Christ, which is not related concerning him in our present Gospels: which shows, that these Gospels, and these, we may say, alone, were the authorities from which the Christians of that day drew the information upon which they depended. One of these instances is of a saying of Christ, not met with in any book now extant.‡ The other, of a circumstance in

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 258.

† 'He cites our present canon, and particularly our four Gospels, continually, I dare say, above two hundred times.'—Jones's New and Full Method. Append. vol. i. p. 589. ed. 1726.

‡ 'Wherefore also our Lord Jesus Christ has said, In whatsoever I shall find you, in the same I will also judge you.' Possibly Justin designed not to quote any text, but to represent the sense of many of our Lord's sayings. Fabricius has observed, that this saying has been quoted by many writers, and that Justin is the only one who ascribes it to our Lord, and that perhaps by a slip of his memory.

'Words resembling these are read repeatedly in Ezekiel; 'I will judge them according to their ways;' chap. vii. 3. xxxiii. 20. It is remarkable that Justin had just before expressly quoted Ezekiel. Mr. Jones upon this circumstance founded a conjecture, that Justin wrote only 'the Lord

Christ's baptism, namely, a fiery or luminous appearance upon the water, which, according to Epiphanius, is noticed in the Gospel of the Hebrews: and which might be true: but which, whether true or false, is mentioned by Justin, with a plain mark of diminution when compared with what he quotes as resting upon Scripture authority. The reader will advert to this distinction: 'And then, when Jesus came to the river Jordan, where John was baptizing, as Jesus descended into the water, a fire also was kindled in Jordan; and when he came up out of the water, *the apostles of this our Christ have written* that the Holy Ghost lighted upon him as a dove.

All the references in Justin are made without mentioning the author; which proves that these books were perfectly notorious, and that there were no other accounts of Christ then extant, or, at least, no others so received and credited, as to make it necessary to distinguish these from the rest.

But although Justin mentions not the author's name, he calls the books, 'Memoirs composed by the Apostles;' 'Memoirs composed by the Apostles and their Companions;' which descriptions, the latter especially, exactly suit with the titles which the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles now bear.

VIII. Hegesippus\* came about thirty years after Justin. His testimony is remarkable only for this particular; that he relates of himself, that travelling from Palestine to Rome, he visited, on his journey, many bishops; and that 'in every succession, and in every city, the same doctrine is taught, which the Law, and the Prophets, and the *Lord* teacheth.' This is an important attestation, from good authority, and of high antiquity. It is generally understood that by the word '*Lord*,' Hegesippus intended some writing or writings, containing the teaching of Christ, in which sense alone the term combines with the other terms '*Law and Prophets*,' which denote writings; and, together with them, admit of the verb '*teacheth*' in the present tense. Then, that these writings were some or all of the books of the New Testament, is rendered probable from hence, that in the fragments of his works, which are preserved in Eusebius, and in a writer of the ninth century, enough, though it be little, is left to show, that Hegesippus expressed divers things in the style of the Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles; that he referred to the history in the second chapter of Matthew, and recited a text of that Gospel as spoken by our Lord.

IX. At this time, viz. about the year 170, the churches of Lyons and Vienne, in France, sent a relation of the sufferings of their martyrs to the churches of Asia and Phrygia.† The epistle is preserved entire by Eusebius. And what carries in some measure the testimony of these churches to a higher age, is, that they had now

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bath said,' intending to quote the words of God, or rather the sense of those words, in Ezekiel; and that some transcriber, imagining these to be the words of Christ, inserted in his copy the addition '*Jesus Christ*.' Vol. i. p. 539.

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 314.

† Ibid. p. 332.

for their bishop, Pothinus, who was ninety years old, and whose early life consequently must have immediately joined on with the times of the apostles. In this epistle are exact references to the Gospel of Luke and John, and to the Acts of the Apostles; the form of reference the same as in all the preceding articles. That from Saint John is in these words: 'Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the Lord, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service.\*'

X. The evidence now opens upon us full and clear. Irenæus succeeded Pothinus as bishop of Lyons. In his youth he had been a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John. In the time in which he lived, he was distant not much more than a century from the publication of the Gospels; in his instruction, only by one step separated from the persons of the apostles. He asserts of himself and his contemporaries, that they were able to reckon up, in all the principal churches, the succession of bishops from the first.† I remark these particulars concerning Irenæus with more formality than usual; because the testimony which this writer affords to the historical books of the New Testament, to their authority, and to the titles which they bear, is express, positive, and exclusive. One principal passage, in which this testimony is contained, opens with a precise assertion of the point which we have laid down as the foundation of our argument, viz. that the story which the Gospels exhibit, is the story which the apostles told. 'We have not received,' saith Irenæus, 'the knowledge of the way of our salvation by any others than those by whom the gospel has been brought to us. Which Gospel they first preached, and afterward, by the will of God, committed to writing, that it might be for time to come the foundation and pillar of our faith. For after that our Lord rose from the dead, and they (the apostles) were endowed from above with the power of the Holy Ghost coming down upon them, they received a perfect knowledge of all things. They then went forth to all the ends of the earth, declaring to men the blessing of heavenly peace, having all of them, and every one, alike, the Gospel of God. Matthew then, among the Jews, wrote a Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel at Rome, and founding a church there: and after their exit, Mark also, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, delivered to us in writing the things that had been preached by Peter; and Luke, the companion of Paul, put down in a book the gospel preached by him (Paul). Afterward John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon his breast, he likewise published a Gospel while he dwelt at Ephesus in Asia.' If any modern divine should write a book upon the genuineness of the Gospels, he could not assert it more expressly, or state their original more distinctly, than Irenæus hath done within little more than a hundred years after they were published.

The correspondency, in the days of Irenæus, of the oral and

\* John xvi. 2.

† Lardner, vol. i. p. 344.

‡ Adv. Hæres. l. iii. c. 3.

written tradition, and the deduction of the oral tradition through various channels from the age of the apostles, which was then lately passed, and, by consequence, the probability that the books truly delivered what the apostles taught, is inferred also with strict-regularity from another passage of his works. 'The tradition of the apostles,' this father saith, 'hath spread itself over the whole universe; and all they, who search after the sources of truth, will find this tradition to be held sacred in every church. We might enumerate all those who have been appointed bishops to these churches by the apostles, and all their successors up to our days. It is by this uninterrupted succession that we have received the tradition which actually exists in the church, as also the doctrines of truth, as it was preached by the apostles.\*' The reader will observe upon this, that the same Irenæus, who is now stating the strength and uniformity of the tradition, we have before seen recognizing, in the fullest manner, the authority of the written records; from which we are entitled to conclude, that they were then conformable to each other.

I have said, that the testimony of Irenæus in favor of our Gospels is *exclusive* of all others. I allude to a remarkable passage in his works, in which, for some reasons sufficiently fanciful, he endeavors to show, that there could be neither more nor fewer Gospels than *four*. With his argument we have no concern. The position itself proves that four, and only four, Gospels were at that time publicly read and acknowledged. That these were our Gospels, and in the state in which we now have them, is shown, from many other places of this writer beside that which we have already alleged. He mentions how Matthew begins his Gospel, how Mark begins and ends his, and their supposed reasons for so doing. He enumerates at length the several passages of Christ's history in Luke, which are not found in any of the other evangelists. He states the particular design with which Saint John composed his Gospel, and accounts for the doctrinal declarations which precede the narrative.

To the book of the Acts of the Apostles, its author, and credit, the testimony of Irenæus is not less explicit. Referring to the account of Saint Paul's conversion and vocation, in the ninth chapter of that book, 'Nor can they,' says he, meaning the parties with whom he argues, 'show that he is not to be credited, who has related to us the truth with the greatest exactness.' In another place, he has actually collected the several texts, in which the writer of the history is represented as accompanying Saint Paul; which leads him to deliver a summary of almost the whole of the last twelve chapters of the book.

In an author thus abounding with references and allusions to the Scriptures, there is not one to any apocryphal Christian writing whatever. This is a broad line of distinction between our sacred books, and the pretensions of all others.

The force of the testimony of the period which we have considered, is greatly strengthened by the observation, that it is the testi-

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\* Iren. in Hær. l. iii. c. 3.

mony, and the concurring testimony, of writers who lived in countries remote from one another. Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin Martyr in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

XI. Omitting Athenagoras and Theophilus, who lived about this time;\* in the remaining works of the former of whom are clear references to Mark and Luke; and in the works of the latter, who was bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the apostles, evident allusions to Matthew and John, and probable allusions to Luke (which, considering the nature of the compositions, that they were addressed to heathen readers, is as much as could be expected); observing also, that the works of two learned Christian writers of the same age, Miltiades and Pantænus,† are now lost; of which Miltiades, Eusebius records, that his writings 'were monuments of zeal for the divine oracles;' and which Pantænus, as Jerome testifies, was a man of prudence and learning, both in the divine Scriptures and secular literature, and had left many commentaries upon the Holy Scriptures then extant; passing by these without farther remark, we come to one of the most voluminous of ancient Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria.‡ Clement followed Irenæus at the distance of only sixteen years, and therefore may be said to maintain the series of testimony in an uninterrupted continuation.

In certain of Clement's works, now lost, but of which various parts are recited by Eusebius, there is given a distinct account of the order in which the four Gospels were written. The Gospels which contain the genealogies, were (he says) written first; Mark's next, at the instance of Peter's followers; and John's the last: and this account he tells us that he had received from presbyters of more ancient times. This testimony proves the following points; that these Gospels were the histories of Christ then publicly received, and relied upon; and that the dates, occasions, and circumstances, of their publication, were at that time subjects of attention and inquiry amongst Christians. In the works of Clement which remain, the four Gospels are repeatedly quoted by the names of their authors, and the Acts of the Apostles is expressly ascribed to Luke. In one place, after mentioning a particular circumstance, he adds these remarkable words: 'We have not this passage *in the four Gospels delivered to us*, but in that according to the Egyptians;' which puts a marked distinction between the four Gospels and all other histories, or pretended histories, of Christ. In another part of his works, the perfect confidence with which he received the Gospels, is signified by these words: 'That this is true, appears from hence, that it was written in the Gospel according to Saint Luke;' and again, 'I need not use many words, but only to allege the evangelic voice of the Lord.' His quotations are numerous. The sayings of Christ, of which he alleges many, are all taken from our

\* Lardner, vol. i. p. 400—422.

† Ibid. vol. ii. p. 469.

‡ Ibid. vol. i. p. 413. 450.

Gospels; the single exception to this observation appearing to be a loose\* quotation of a passage in Saint Matthew's Gospel.

XII. In the age in which they lived,† Tertullian joins on with Clement. The number of the Gospels then received, the names of the evangelists, and their proper descriptions, are exhibited by this writer in one short sentence:—‘Among the *apostles*, John and Matthew teach us the faith; among *apostolical men*, Luke and Mark refresh it.’ The next passage to be taken from Tertullian, affords as complete an attestation to the authenticity of our books, as can be well imagined. After enumerating the churches which had been founded by Paul, at Corinth, in Galatia, at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus; the church of Rome established by Peter and Paul, and other churches derived from John; he proceeds thus:—‘I say then, that with them, but not with them only which are apostolical, but with all who have fellowship with them in the same faith, is that Gospel of Luke received from its first publication, which we so zealously maintain:’ and presently afterward adds; ‘The same authority of the apostolical churches will support the other Gospels, which we have from them and according to them, I mean John’s and Matthew’s; although that likewise which Mark published may be said to be Peter’s, whose interpreter Mark was.’ In another place Tertullian affirms, that the three other Gospels were in the hands of the churches from the beginning, as well as Luke’s. This noble testimony fixes the universality with which the Gospels were received, and their antiquity; that they were in the hands of all, and had been so from the first. And this evidence appears not more than one hundred and fifty years after the publication of the books. The reader must be given to understand, that when Tertullian speaks of maintaining or defending (*tuendi*) the Gospel of Saint Luke, he only means maintaining or defending the integrity of the copies of Luke received by Christian churches, in opposition to certain curtailed copies used by Marcion, against whom he writes.

This author frequently cites the Acts of the Apostles under that title, once calls it Luke’s Commentary, and observes how Saint Paul’s epistles confirm it.

After this general evidence, it is unnecessary to add particular quotations. These, however, are so numerous and ample, as to have led Dr. Lardner to observe, ‘that there are more, and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament in this one

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\* ‘Ask great things, and the small shall be added unto you.’ Clement rather chose to expound the words of Matthew (chap. vi. 33.) than literally to cite them; and this is most undeniably proved by another place in the same Clement, where he both produces the text and these words as an exposition:—‘Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, for these are the great things: but the small things, and things relating to this life, shall be added unto you.’ Jones’s New and Full Method, vol. i. p. 553.

† Lardner, vol. ii. p. 561.



Christian author, than there are of all the works of Cicero in writers of all characters for several ages.\*

Tertullian quotes no Christian writing as of equal authority with the Scriptures, and no spurious books at all; a broad line of distinction, we may once more observe, between our sacred books and all others.

We may again likewise remark the wide extent through which the reputation of the Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles, had spread, and the perfect consent, in this point, of distant and independent societies. It is now only about one hundred and fifty years since Christ was crucified; and within this period, to say nothing of the apostolical fathers who have been noticed already, we have Justin Martyr at Neapolis, Theophilus at Antioch, Irenæus in France, Clement at Alexandria, Tertullian at Carthage, quoting the same books of historical Scriptures, and, I may say, quoting these alone.

XIII. An interval of only thirty years, and that occupied by no small number of Christian writers,† whose works only remain in fragments and quotations, and in every one of which is some reference or other to the Gospels (and in one of them, Hippolytus, as preserved in Theodoret, is an abstract of the whole Gospel history), brings us to a name of great celebrity in Christian antiquity, Origen‡ of Alexandria, who, in the quantity of his writings, exceeded the most laborious of the Greek and Latin authors. Nothing can be more peremptory upon the subject now under consideration, and, from a writer of his learning and information, more satisfactory, than the declaration of Origen, preserved, in an extract from his works, by Eusebius; 'That the four Gospels alone are received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven:' to which declaration is immediately subjoined, a brief history of the respective authors, to whom they were then, as they are now, ascribed. The language holden concerning the Gospels, throughout the works of Origen which remain, entirely correspond with the testimony here cited. His attestation to the Acts of the Apostles is no less positive: 'And Luke also once more sounds the trumpet, relating the acts of the apostles.' The universality with which the Scriptures were then read, is well signified by this writer, in a passage in which he has occasion to observe against Celsus, 'That it is not in any private books, or such as are read by a few only, and those studious persons, but in books read by every body, that it is written. The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by things that are made.' It is to no purpose to single out quotations of Scripture from such a writer as this. We might as well make a selection of the quotations of Scripture in Dr. Clarke's Sermons. They are so thickly

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\* Lardner, vol. ii. p. 647.

† Minucius Felix, Apollonius, Caius, Asterius, Urbanus, Alexander bishop of Jerusalem, Hippolytus, Ammonius, Julius Africanus.

‡ Lardner, vol. ii. p. 234.

sown in the works of Origen, that Dr. Mill says, 'If we had all his works remaining, we should have before us almost the whole text of the Bible.'\*

Origen notices, in order to censure, certain apocryphal Gospels. He also uses four writings of this sort; that is, throughout his large works he once or twice, at the most, quotes each of the four; but always with some mark, either of direct reprobation or of caution to his readers, manifestly esteeming them of little or no authority.

XIV. Gregory bishop of Neocæsarea, and Dionysius of Alexandria, were scholars of Origen. Their testimony, therefore, though full and particular, may be reckoned a repetition only of his. The series, however, of evidence is continued by Cyprian bishop of Carthage, who flourished within twenty years after Origen. 'The church,' says this father, 'is watered, like Paradise, by four rivers, that is, by four Gospels.' The Acts of the Apostles is also frequently quoted by Cyprian under that name, and the name of the 'Divine Scriptures.' In his various writings are such constant and copious citations of Scripture, as to place this part of the testimony beyond controversy. Nor is there, in the works of this eminent African bishop, one quotation of a spurious or apocryphal Christian writing.

XV. Passing over a crowd of writers following Cyprian at different distances, but all within forty years of his time; and who all, in the imperfect remains of their works, either cite the historical Scriptures of the New Testament, or speak of them in terms of profound respect; I single out Victorin, bishop of Pettaw in Germany, merely on account of the remoteness of his situation from that of Origen and Cyprian, who were Africans; by which circumstance his testimony, taken in conjunction with theirs, prove that the Scripture histories, and the same histories, were known and received from one side of the Christian world to the other. This bishop† lived about the year 290: and in a commentary upon this text of the Revelation, 'The first was like a lion, the second was like a calf, the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle,' he makes out that by the four creatures are intended the four Gospels; and, to show the propriety of the symbols, he recites the subject with which each evangelist opens his history. The explication is fanciful, but the testimony positive. He also expressly cites the Acts of the Apostles.

XVI. Arnobius and Lactantius,§ about the year 300, composed formal arguments upon the credibility of the Christian religion. As these arguments were addressed to Gentiles, the authors abstain from quoting Christian books *by name*; one of them giving this very reason for his reserve; but when they come to state for the information of their readers, the outlines of Christ's history, it is apparent

\* Mill, Proleg. cap. vi. p. 66.

† Novatus, Rome, A. D. 251; Dionysius, Rome, A. D. 259; Commodian, A. D. 270; Anatolius, Laodicea, A. D. 270; Theognostus, A. D. 282; Methodius, Lycia, A. D. 290; Phileas, Egypt, A. D. 226.

‡ Lardner, vol. v. p. 214.

§ Ibid. vol. vii. p. 43. 201.

that they draw their accounts from our Gospels, and from no other sources; for these statements exhibit a summary of almost every thing which is related of Christ's actions and miracles by the four evangelists. Arnobius vindicates, without mentioning their names, the credit of these historians; observing, that they were eye-witnesses of the facts which they relate, and that their ignorance of the arts of composition was rather a confirmation of their testimony, than an objection to it. Lactantius also argues in defence of the religion, from the consistency, simplicity, disinterestedness, and sufferings of the Christian historians, meaning by that term our evangelists.

XVII. We close the series of testimonies with that of Eusebius,\* bishop of Cæsarea, who flourished in the year 315, contemporary with, or posterior only by fifteen years to, the two authors last cited. This voluminous writer, and most diligent collector of the writings of others, beside a variety of large works, composed a history of the affairs of Christianity from its origin to his own time. His testimony to the Scriptures is the testimony of a man much conversant in the works of Christian authors, written during the first three centuries of its era, and who had read many which are now lost. In a passage of his Evangelical Demonstration, Eusebius remarks, with great nicety, the delicacy of two of the evangelists, in their manner of noticing any circumstance which regarded themselves; and of Mark, as writing under Peter's direction, in the circumstances which regarded him. The illustration of this remark leads him to bring together long quotations from each of the evangelists; and the whole passage is a proof, that Eusebius, and the Christians of those days, not only read the Gospels, but studied them with attention and exactness. In a passage of his Ecclesiastical History, he treats, in form, and at large, of the occasions of writing the four Gospels, and of the order in which they were written. The title of the chapter is, 'Of the Order of the Gospels;' and it begins thus: 'Let us observe the writings of this apostle John, which are not contradicted by any: and, first of all, must be mentioned, as acknowledged by all, the Gospel according to him, well known to all the churches under heaven; and that it has been justly placed by the ancients the fourth in order, and after the other three, may be made evident in this manner.'—Eusebius then proceeds to show that John wrote the last of the four, and that his Gospel was intended to supply the omissions of the others; especially in the part of our Lord's ministry, which took place before the imprisonment of John the Baptist. He observes, 'that the apostles of Christ were not studious of the ornaments of composition, nor indeed forward to write at all, being wholly occupied with their ministry.'

This learned author makes no use at all of Christian writings, forged with the names of Christ's apostles, or their companions.

We close this branch of our evidence here, because after Euse-

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\* Lardner, vol. viii. p. 33.

bins, there is no room for any question upon the subject; the works of Christian writers being as full of texts of Scripture and of references to Scripture, as the discourses of modern divines. Future testimonies to the books of Scripture could only prove, that they never lost their character or authority.

## SECT. II.

*When the Scriptures are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted with peculiar respect, as books sui generis; as possessing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians.*

BESIDE the general strain of reference and quotation, which uniformly and strongly indicates this distinction, the following may be regarded as specific testimonies:

I. Theophilus\* bishop of Antioch, the sixth in succession from the apostles, and who flourished little more than a century after the books of the New Testament were written, having occasion to quote one of our Gospels, writes thus: 'These things the Holy Scriptures teach us, and all who were moved by the Holy Spirit, among whom John says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.' Again: 'Concerning the righteousness which the law teaches, the like things are to be found in the Prophets and the Gospels, because that, being inspired, spoke by one and the same Spirit of God.'† No words can testify more strongly than these do, the high and peculiar respect in which these books were holden.

II. A writer against Artemon,‡ who may be supposed to come about one hundred and fifty-eight years after the publication of the Scripture, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, uses these expressions: 'Possibly what they (our adversaries) say, might have been credited, if first of all the Divine Scriptures did not contradict them; and then the writings of certain brethren more ancient than the times of Victor.' The brethren mentioned by name, are Justin, Miltiades, Tatian, Clement, Irenæus, Melito, with a general appeal to many more not named. This passage proves, first, that there was at that time a collection called *Divine Scriptures*; secondly, that these Scriptures were esteemed of higher authority than the writings of the most early and celebrated Christians.

III. In a piece ascribed to Hippolytus,§ who lived near the same time, the author professes, in giving his correspondent instruction in the things about which he inquires, 'to draw out of the *sacred fountain*, and to set before him from the sacred Scriptures, what may afford him satisfaction.' He then quotes immediately Paul's epistles to Timothy, and afterward many books of the New Testament.

\* Lardner, Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 429.

† Ib. vol. iii. p. 40.

‡ Ib. vol. i. p. 448.

§ Ib. vol. iii. p. 112.

This preface to the quotations carries in it a marked distinction between the Scriptures and other books.

IV. 'Our assertions and discourses (saith Origen\*), are unworthy of credit; we must receive the *Scriptures* as witnesses.' After treating of the duty of prayer, he proceeds with his argument thus: 'What we have said, may be proved from the Divine Scriptures.' In his books against Celsus, we find this passage: 'That our religion teaches us to seek after wisdom shall be shown, both out of the ancient Jewish Scriptures, which we also use, and out of those written since Jesus, which are believed in the churches to be divine.' These expressions afford abundant evidence of the peculiar and exclusive authority which the Scriptures possessed.

V. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage,† whose age lies close to that of Origen, earnestly exhorts Christian teachers, in all doubtful cases, 'to go back to the *fountain*; and, if the truth has in any case been shaken, to recur to the Gospels and apostolic writings.'—'The precepts of the gospel (says he in another place), are nothing less than authoritative divine lessons, the foundations of our hope, the supports of our faith, the guides of our way, the safe-guards of our course to heaven.'

VI. Novatus,‡ a Roman, contemporary with Cyprian, appeals to the Scriptures, as the authority by which all errors were to be repelled, and disputes decided. 'That Christ is not only man, but God also, is proved by the sacred authority of the Divine Writings.'—'The Divine Scripture easily detects and confutes the frauds of heretics.'—'It is not by the fault of the heavenly Scriptures, which never deceive.' Stronger assertions than these could not be used.

VII. At the distance of twenty years from the writer last cited, Anatolius,§ a learned Alexandrian, and bishop of Laodicea, speaking of the rule for keeping Easter, a question at that day agitated with much earnestness, says of those whom he opposed, 'They can by no means prove their point by the authority of the divine Scripture.'

VIII. The Arians, who sprung up about fifty years after this, argued strenuously against the use of the words consubstantial, and essence, and like phrases; '*because they were not in Scripture.*'|| And in the same strain, one of their advocates opens a conference with Augustine, after the following manner: 'If you say what is reasonable, I must submit. If you allege any thing from the Divine Scriptures, which are common to both, I must hear. But unscriptural expressions (*quæ extra Scripturam sunt*) deserve no regard.'

Athanasius, the great antagonist of Arianism, after having enumerated the books of the Old and New Testament, adds, 'These are the fountain of salvation, that he who thirsts may be satisfied with the oracles contained in them. In these alone the doctrine of salvation

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. iii. p. 287—289.

† Ib. vol. v. p. 102.

‡ Ib. vol. vii. p. 283, 284.

† Ib. vol. iv. p. 840.

§ Ib. p. 146.

is proclaimed. Let no man add to them, or take any thing from them.\*

IX. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem,† who wrote about twenty years after the appearance of Arianism, uses these remarkable words: ‘Concerning the divine and holy mysteries of faith, not the least article ought to be delivered without the Divine Scriptures.’ We are assured that Cyril’s Scriptures were the same as ours, for he has left us a catalogue of the books included under that name.

X. Epiphanius,‡ twenty years after Cyril, challenges the Arians, and the followers of Origen, ‘to produce any passage of the Old and New Testament, favoring their sentiments.’

XI. Phœbadius, a Gallic bishop, who lived about thirty years after the council of Nice, testifies, that ‘the bishops of that council first consulted the sacred volumes, and then declared their faith.’§

XII. Basil, bishop of Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, contemporary with Epiphanius, says, ‘that hearers instructed in the Scriptures ought to examine what is said by their teachers, and to embrace what is agreeable to the Scriptures, and to reject what is otherwise.’||

XIII. Ephraim, the Syrian, a celebrated writer of the same times, bears this conclusive testimony to the proposition which forms the subject of our present chapter: ‘The truth written in the sacred volume of the gospel, is a perfect rule. Nothing can be taken from it nor added to it, without great guilt.’¶

XIV. If we add Jerome to these, it is only for the evidence which he affords of the judgment of preceding ages. Jerome observes, concerning the quotations of *ancient* Christian writers, that is, of writers who were *ancient* in the year 400, that they made a distinction between books; some they quoted as of authority, and others not: which observation relates to the books of Scripture, compared with other writings, apocryphal or heathen.\*\*

### SECT. III.

*The Scriptures were in very early times collected into a distinct volume.*

IGNATIUS, who was bishop of Antioch within forty years after the Ascension, and who had lived and conversed with the apostles, speaks of the gospel and of the apostles in terms which render it very probable that he meant by the gospel, the book or volume of the Gospels, and by the Apostles, the book or volume of their epistles. His words in one place are,†† ‘Fleeing to the gospel as the flesh of Jesus, and to the apostles as the presbytery of the church:’ that is,

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. xii. p. 182.

† Ib. p. 314.

‡ Ib. p. 124.

\*\* Ib. vol. x. p. 123, 124.

† Ib. vol. viii. p. 276.

§ Ib. vol. ix. p. 52.

¶ Ib. vol. ix. p. 222.

†† Ib. part ii. vol. i. p. 180.

as Le Clerc interprets them, 'in order to understand the will of God, he fled to the Gospels, which he believed no less than if Christ in the flesh had been speaking to him; and to the writings of the apostles, whom he esteemed as the presbytery of the whole Christian church.' It must be observed, that about eighty years after this, we have direct proof, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria,\* that these two names, 'Gospel,' and 'Apostles,' were the names by which the writings of the New Testament, and the division of these writings, were usually expressed.

Another passage from Ignatius is the following: 'But the gospel has somewhat in it more excellent, the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, his passion and resurrection.'†

And a third: 'Ye ought to hearken to the prophets, but especially to the gospel, in which the passion has been manifested to us, and the resurrection perfected.' In this last passage, the prophets and the gospel are put in conjunction; and as Ignatius undoubtedly meant by the prophets a collection of writings, it is probable that he meant the same by the gospel, the two terms standing in evident parallelism with each other.

This interpretation of the word 'Gospel,' in the passages above quoted from Ignatius, is confirmed by a piece of nearly equal antiquity, the relation of the martyrdom of Polycarp by the church of Smyrna. 'All things (say they) that went before, were done, that the Lord might show us a martyrdom according to the gospel, for he expected to be delivered up as the Lord also did.'‡ And in another place, 'We do not commend those who offer themselves, forasmuch as the gospel teaches us no such thing.'§ In both these places, what is called the *Gospels*, seems to be the history of Jesus Christ, and of his doctrine.

If this be the true sense of the passages, they are not only evidences of our proposition, but strong and very ancient proofs of the high esteem in which the books of the New Testament were holden.

II. Eusebius relates, that Quadratus and some others, who were the immediate successors of the apostles, travelling abroad to preach Christ, carried the Gospels with them, and delivered them to their converts. The words of Eusebius are: 'Then travelling abroad, they performed the work of evangelists, being ambitious to preach Christ, and deliver the Scripture of the divine Gospels.'|| Eusebius had before him the writings both of Quadratus himself, and of many others of that age, which are now lost. It is reasonable, therefore, to believe that he had good grounds for his assertion. What is thus recorded of the Gospels, took place within sixty, or at the most, seventy years after they were published: and it is evident, that they must, before this time (and, it is probable, long before this time), have been in general use, and in high esteem in the churches planted by the apostles, inasmuch as they were now, we find, col-

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. ii. p. 516.

† Ignat. Ep. c. i.

‡ Lardner, Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 236.

† Ib. part ii. vol. ii. p. 182.

§ Ib. c. iv.

lected into a volume; and the immediate successors of the apostles, they who preached the religion of Christ to those who had not already heard it, carried the volume with them, and delivered it to their converts.

III. Irenæus, in the year 178,\* puts the evangelic and apostolic writings in connexion with the Law and the Prophets, manifestly intending by the one a code or collection of Christian sacred writings, as the other expressed the code or collection of Jewish sacred writings. And,

IV. Melito, at this time bishop of Sardis, writing to one Onesimus, tells his correspondent,† that he had procured an accurate account of the books of the Old Testament. The occurrence, in this passage, of the term *Old Testament*, has been brought to prove, and it certainly does prove, that there was then a volume or collection of writings called the *New Testament*.

V. In the time of Clement of Alexandria, about fifteen years after the last quoted testimony, it is apparent that the Christian Scriptures were divided into parts, under the general titles of the Gospels and Apostles; and that both these were regarded as of the highest authority. One, out of many expressions of Clement, alluding to this distribution, is the following:—‘There is a consent and harmony between the Law and the Prophets, the Apostles and the Gospel.‡’

VI. The same division, ‘Prophets, Gospels, and Apostles,’ appears in Tertullian,§ the contemporary of Clement. The collection of the Gospels is likewise called by this writer the ‘*Evangelic Instrument*;’|| the whole volume, the ‘*New Testament*,’ and the two parts, the ‘*Gospels and Apostles*.’¶

VII. From many writers also of the third century, and especially from Cyprian, who lived in the middle of it, it is collected, that the Christian Scriptures were divided into two codes or volumes, one called the ‘*Gospels, or Scriptures of the Lord*,’ the other, the ‘*Apostles, or Epistles of the Apostles*.’\*\*

VIII. Eusebius, as we have already seen, takes some pains to show, that the Gospel of St. John had been justly placed by the ancients ‘the fourth in order, and after the other three.’†† These are the terms of his proposition: and the very introduction of such an argument proves incontestably, that the four Gospels had been collected into a volume, to the exclusion of every other; that their order in the volume had been adjusted with much consideration; and that this had been done by those who were called ancients in the time of Eusebius.

In the Diocletian persecution, in the year 303, the Scriptures were sought out and burnt:‡‡ many suffered death rather than deliver them up; and those who betrayed them to the persecutors, were accounted as lapse and apostate. On the other hand, Constantine,

\* Lardner, Cred. part ii. vol. i. p. 383.

† Ib. vol. ii. p. 516.

‡ Ib. p. 632.

§ Ib. p. 631.

¶ Ib. vol. vii. p. 214, &c.

† Ib. p. 331.

‡ Ib. p. 574.

§ Ib. vol. viii. p. 90.

\*\* Ib. vol. iv. p. 846.

†† Ib. vol. viii. p. 90.



after his conversion, gave directions for multiplying copies of the divine oracles, and for magnificently adorning them, at the expense of the imperial treasury.\* What the Christians of that age so richly embellished in their prosperity, and which is more, so tenaciously preserved under persecution, was the very volume of the New Testament which we now read.

#### SECT. IV.

*Our present sacred writings were soon distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect.*

POLYCARP. 'I trust that ye are well exercised in the *Holy Scriptures*;—as in these Scriptures it is said, Be ye angry and sin not, and let not the sun go down upon your wrath.† This passage is extremely important: because it proves that, in the time of Polycarp, who had lived with the apostles, there were Christian writings distinguished by the name of 'Holy Scriptures,' or *Sacred Writings*. Moreover, the text quoted by Polycarp is a text found in the collection at this day. What also the same Polycarp hath elsewhere quoted in the same manner, may be considered as proved to belong to the collection; and this comprehends Saint Matthew's, and probably Saint Luke's Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, ten epistles of Paul, the First Epistle of Peter, and the First of John.‡ In another place, Polycarp has these words: 'Whoever perverts the *oracles of the Lord* to his own lusts, and says there is neither resurrection nor judgment, he is the first-born of Satan.'§—It does not appear what else Polycarp could mean by the 'oracles of the Lord,' but those same 'Holy Scriptures,' or *Sacred Writings*, of which he had spoken before.

II. Justin Martyr, whose apology was written about thirty years after Polycarp's epistle, expressly cites some of our present histories under the title of GOSPEL, and that not as a name by him first ascribed to them, but as the name by which they were generally known in his time. His words are these:—'For the apostles in the memoirs composed by them, *which are called Gospels*, have thus delivered it, that Jesus commanded them to take bread, and give thanks.'|| There exists no doubt, but that, by the memoirs above mentioned, Justin meant our present historical Scriptures; for throughout his works he quotes these, and no others.

III. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, who came thirty years after Justin, in a passage preserved in Eusebius (for his works are lost), speaks 'of the Scriptures of the Lord.'¶

IV. And at the same time, or very nearly so, by Irenæus bishop

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. vii. p. 432.

† Ib. vol. i. p. 223.

§ Ib. p. 222.

‡ Ib. vol. i. p. 203.

|| Ib. p. 271.

¶ Ib. p. 298.

of Lyons in France,\* they are called 'Divine Scriptures,'—'Divine Oracles,'—'Scriptures of the Lord,'—'Evangelic and Apostolic Writings.† The quotations of Irenæus prove decidedly, that our present Gospels, and these alone, together with the Acts of the Apostles, were the historical books comprehended by him under these appellations.

V. Saint Matthew's Gospel is quoted by Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, contemporary with Irenæus, under the title of the 'Evangelic Voice;‡ and the copious works of Clement of Alexandria, published within fifteen years of the same time, ascribe to the books of the New Testament the various titles of 'Sacred Books,'—'Divine Scriptures,'—'Divinely inspired Scriptures,'—'Scriptures of the Lord,'—'the true Evangelical Canon.§

VI. Tertullian, who joins on with Clement, beside adopting most of the names and epithets above noticed, calls the Gospels 'our Digesta,' in allusion, as it should seem, to some collection of Roman laws then extant.||

VII. By Origen, who came thirty years after Tertullian, the same, and other no less strong titles, are applied to the Christian Scriptures: and, in addition thereunto, this writer frequently speaks of the 'Old and New Testament,'—'The Ancient and New Scriptures,'—'the Ancient and New Oracles.'¶

VIII. In Cyprian, who was not twenty years later, they are 'Books of the Spirit,'—'Divine Fountains,'—'Fountain of the Divine Fullness.

The expressions we have thus quoted, are evidences of high and peculiar respect. They all occur within two centuries from the publication of the books. Some of them commence with the companions of the apostles, and they increase in number and variety, through a series of writers touching one upon another, and deduced from the first age of the religion.

## SECT. V.

*Our Scriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians.*

JUSTIN MARTYR, who wrote in the year 140, which was seventy or eighty years after some, and less, probably, after others of the Gospels were published, giving, in his first apology, an account to the emperor of the Christian worship, has this remarkable passage:

'The *Memoirs of the Apostles*, or the Writings of the Prophets, are read according as the time allows: and, when the reader has ended,

\* The reader will observe the remoteness of these two writers in country and situation.

† Lardner, Cred. vol. i. p. 343, &c.

§ Ib. vol. ii. p. 515.

¶ Ib. vol. iii. p. 230.

‡ Ib. p. 427.

|| Ib. p. 630.

\*\* Ib. vol. iv. p. 844.

the president makes a discourse, exhorting to the imitation of so excellent things.\*

A few short observations will show the value of this testimony.

1. The 'Memoirs of the Apostles,' Justin in another place expressly tells us, are what are called 'Gospels:' and that they were the Gospels which we now use, is made certain by Justin's numerous quotations of *them*, and his silence about any others.

2. Justin describes the general usage of the Christian church.

3. Justin does not speak of it as recent or newly instituted, but in the terms in which men speak of established customs.

II. Tertullian, who followed Justin at the distance of about fifty years, in his account of the religious assemblies of Christians as they were conducted in his time, says, 'We come together to recollect the Divine Scriptures; we nourish our faith, raise our hope, confirm our trust, by the sacred word.†

III. Eusebius records of Origen, and cites for his authority the letters of bishops contemporary with Origen, that, when he went into Palestine about the year 216, which was only sixteen years after the date of Tertullian's testimony, he was desired by the bishops of that country to discourse and expound the Scriptures publicly in the church, though he was not yet ordained a presbyter.‡ This anecdote recognizes the usage not only of reading, but of expounding, the Scriptures; and both as subsisting in full force. Origen also himself bears witness to the same practice: 'This (says he) we do, when the Scriptures are read in the church, and when the discourse for explication is delivered to the people.§ And what is a still more ample testimony, many homilies of his upon the Scriptures of the New Testament, delivered by him in the assemblies of the church, are still extant.

IV. Cyprian, whose age was not twenty years lower than that of Origen, gives his people an account of having ordained two persons, who were before confessors, to be readers; and what they were to read, appears by the reason which he gives for his choice. 'Nothing (says Cyprian) can be more fit, than that he, who has made a glorious confession of the Lord, should read publicly in the church; that he who has shown himself willing to die a martyr, should read the *Gospel of Christ* by which martyrs are made.¶

V. Intimations of the same custom may be traced in a great number of writers in the beginning and throughout the whole of the fourth century. Of these testimonies I will only use one, as being of itself, express and full. Augustine, who appeared near the conclusion of the century, displays the benefit of the Christian religion on this very account, the public reading of the Scriptures in the churches, 'where (says he) is a confluence of all sorts of people of both sexes; and where they hear how they ought to live well in this world, that they may deserve to live happily and eternally in

\* Lardner. Cred. vol. i. p. 273.

† Ib. vol. iii. p. 68.

‡ Ib. vol. iv. p. 842.

† Ib. vol. ii. p. 628.

§ Ib. vol. iii. p. 302.

another.' And this custom he declares to be universal: 'The canonical books of Scripture being read everywhere, the miracles therein recorded are well known to all people.\*'

It does not appear that any books, other than our present Scriptures, were thus publicly read, except that the epistle of Clement was read in the church of Corinth to which it had been addressed, and some in others: and that the Shepherd of Hermas was read in many churches. Nor does it subtract much from the value of the argument, that these two writings partly come within it, because we allow them to be the genuine writings of apostolical men. There is not the least evidence, that any other Gospel, than the four which we receive, was ever admitted to this distinction.

## SECT. VI.

*Commentaries were anciently written upon the Scriptures; harmonies formed out of them; different copies carefully collected; and versions made of them into different languages.*

No greater proof can be given of the esteem in which these books were holden by the ancient Christians, or of the sense they entertained of their value and importance, than the industry bestowed upon them. And it ought to be observed, that the value and importance of these books consisted entirely in their genuineness and truth. There was nothing in them, as works of taste, or as compositions, which could have induced any one to have written a note upon them. Moreover it shows that they were even *then* considered as ancient books. Men do not write comments upon publications of their own times: therefore the testimonies cited under this head afford an evidence which carries up the evangelic writings much beyond the age of the testimonies themselves, and to that of their reputed authors.

I. Tatian, a follower of Justin Martyr, and who flourished about the year 170, composed a harmony, or collation of the Gospels, which he called *Diatessaron*, Of the four.† The title, as well as the work, is remarkable; because it shows that then, as now, there were four, and only four, Gospels in general use with Christians. And this was little more than a hundred years after the publication of some of them.

II. Pantænus, of the Alexandrian school, a man of great reputation and learning, who came twenty years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries upon the Holy Scriptures, which, as Jerome testifies, were extant in his time.‡

III. Clement of Alexandria wrote short explications of many books of the Old and New Testament.§

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. x. p. 276, &c.

† Ib. p. 455.

‡ Ib. vol. i. p. 307.

§ Ib. vol. ii. p. 462.

IV. Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later version, then in use, to the authentic Greek.\*

V. An anonymous author, quoted by Eusebius, and who appears to have written about the year 212, appeals to the *ancient copies* of the Scriptures in refutation of some corrupt readings alleged by the followers of Artemon.†

VI. The same Eusebius, mentioning by name several writers of the church who lived at this time, and concerning whom he says, 'There still remain divers monuments of the laudable industry of those ancient and ecclesiastical men' (i. e. of Christian writers who were considered as ancient in the year 300), adds, 'There are, besides, treatises of many others, whose names we have not been able to learn, orthodox and ecclesiastical men, as the interpretations of the Divine Scriptures given by each of them show.‡

VII. The last five testimonies may be referred to the year 200; immediately after which, a period of thirty years gives us

Julius Africanus, who wrote an epistle upon the apparent difference in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke, which he endeavors to reconcile by the distinction of natural and legal descent, and conducts his hypothesis with great industry through the whole series of generations.§

Ammonius, a learned Alexandrian, who composed, as Tatian had done, a harmony of *the four Gospels*; which proves, as Tatian's work did, that there were four Gospels, and no more, at this time, in use in the church. It affords also an instance of the zeal of Christians for those writings, and of their solicitude about them.||

And, above both these, Origen, who wrote commentaries, or homilies, upon most of the books included in the New Testament, and upon no other books but these. In particular, he wrote upon Saint John's Gospel, very largely upon Saint Mathew's, and commentaries, or homilies, upon the Acts of the Apostles.¶

VIII. In addition to these the third century likewise contains

Dionysius of Alexandria, a very learned man, who compared with great accuracy, the accounts in the four Gospels of the time of Christ's resurrection, adding a reflection which showed his opinion of their authority: 'Let us not think that the evangelists disagree, or contradict each other, although there be some small difference; but let us honestly and faithfully endeavor to reconcile what we read.'\*\*

Victorin, bishop of Pettaw, in Germany, who wrote comments upon Saint Matthew's Gospel.††

Lucian, a presbyter of Antioch; and Hesychius, an Egyptian bishop, who put forth editions of the New Testament.

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. ii. p. 638.

† Ib. vol. ii. p. 551.

‡ Ib. p. 122.

\*\* Ib. vol. iv. p. 166.

† Ib. vol. iii. p. 46.

§ Ib. vol. iii. p. 170.

¶ Ib. p. 352. 192. 202. 245.

†† Ib. p. 195.

IX. The fourth century supplies a catalogue\* of fourteen writers, who expended their labors upon the books of the New Testament, and whose works or names are come down to our times; amongst which number it may be sufficient, for the purpose of showing the sentiments and studies of learned Christians of that age, to notice the following:

Eusebius, in the very beginning of the century, wrote expressly upon the discrepancies observable in the Gospels, and likewise a treatise, in which he pointed out what things are related by four, what by three, what by two, and what by one evangelist.† This author also testifies, what is certainly a material piece of evidence, 'that the writings of the apostles had obtained such an esteem, as to be translated into every language both of Greeks and Barbarians, and to be diligently studied by all nations.'‡ This testimony was given about the year 300; how long *before* that date these translations were made does not appear.

Damasus, bishop of Rome, corresponded with Saint Jerome upon the exposition of difficult texts of Scripture: and, in a letter still remaining, desires Jerome to give him a clear explanation of the word *Hosanna*, found in the New Testament; 'he (Damasus) having met with very different interpretations of it in the Greek and Latin commentaries of Catholic writers which he had read.'§ This last clause shows the number and variety of commentaries then extant.

Gregory of Nyssen, at one time, appeals to the most exact copies of St. Mark's Gospel; at another time, compares together, and proposes to reconcile, the several accounts of the resurrection *given by the four Evangelists*; which limitation proves, that there were no other histories of Christ deemed authentic beside these, or included in the same character with these. This writer observes, acutely enough, that the disposition of the clothes in the sepulchre, the napkin that was about our Saviour's head, not lying with the linen clothes; but wrapped together in a place by itself, did not bespeak the terror and hurry of thieves, and therefore refutes the story of the body being stolen.||

Ambrose, bishop of Milan, remarked various readings in the Latin copies of the New Testament, and appeals to the original Greek;

And Jerome, towards the conclusion of this century, put forth an edition of the New Testament in Latin, corrected, at least as to the Gospels, by Greek copies, 'and those (he says) ancient.'

* Eusebius, A. D. . . .	315
Juvenus, Spain . . .	330
Theodore, Thrace . . .	334
Hilary, Poitiers . . .	354
Fortunatus . . .	340
Apollinarius of Laodicea	362
Damasus, Rome . . .	366
Gregory, Nyssen . . .	371

Didimus of Alexandria .	370
Ambrose of Milan . . .	374
Diodore of Tarsus . . .	378
Gaudent of Brescia . .	387
Theodore of Cilicia . .	394
Jerome . . . . .	392
Chrysostom . . . . .	398

† Lardner, Cred. vol. viii. p. 46.  
§ Ib. vol. ix. p. 108.

† Ib. p. 201.  
|| Ib. p. 163.

Lastly, Chrysostom, it is well known, delivered and published a great many homilies, or sermons, upon the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

It is needless to bring down this article lower; but it is of importance to add, that there is no example of Christian writers of the first three centuries composing comments upon any other books than those which are found in the New Testament, except the single one of Clement of Alexandria commenting upon a book called the Revelation of Peter.

Of the *ancient versions* of the New Testament, one of the most valuable is the Syriac. Syriac was the language of Palestine when Christianity was there first established. And although the books of Scripture were written in Greek, for the purpose of a more extended circulation than within the precincts of Judea, yet, it is probable that they would soon be translated into the vulgar language of the country where the religion first prevailed. Accordingly, a Syriac translation is now extant, all along, so far as it appears, used by the inhabitants of Syria, bearing many internal marks of high antiquity, supported in its pretensions by the uniform traditions of the east, and confirmed by the discovery of many very ancient manuscripts in the libraries of Europe. It is about two hundred years since a bishop of Antioch sent a copy of this translation into Europe, to be printed; and this seems to be the first time that the translation became generally known to these parts of the world. The bishop of Antioch's Testament was found to contain all our books, except the second epistle of Peter, the second and third of John, and the Revelation; which books, however, have since been discovered in that language in some ancient manuscripts of Europe. But in this collection, no other book, beside what is in ours, appears ever to have had a place. And, which is worthy of observation, the text, though preserved in a remote country, and without communication with ours, differs from ours very little, and in nothing that is important.\*

## SECT. VII.

*Our Scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different sects and persuasions, by many heretics as well as Catholics, and were usually appealed to by both sides in the controversies which arose in those days.*

THE three most ancient topics of controversy amongst Christians, were, the authority of the Jewish constitution, the origin of evil, and the nature of Christ. Upon the first of these we find, in very early times, one class of heretics rejecting the Old Testament entirely; another contending for the obligation of its law, in all its parts, throughout its whole extent, and over every one who sought acceptance with God. Upon the two latter subjects, a natural, per-

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\* Jones on the Canon, vol. i. c. 24.

haps, and venial, but a fruitless, eager, and impatient curiosity, prompted by the philosophy and by the scholastic habits of the age, which carried men much into bold hypotheses and conjectural solutions, raised, amongst some who professed Christianity, very wild and unfounded opinions. I think there is no reason to believe that the number of these bore any considerable proportion to the body of the Christian church; and amidst the disputes which such opinions necessarily occasioned, it is a great satisfaction to perceive, what, in a vast plurality of instances, we do perceive, all sides recurring to the same Scriptures.

\*I. Basilides lived near the age of the apostles, about the year 120, or, perhaps, sooner.† He rejected the Jewish institution, not as spurious, but as proceeding from a being inferior to the true God; and in other respects advanced a scheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Christian church, and which, as it gained over some disciples, was warmly opposed by Christian writers of the second and third century. In these writings, there is positive evidence that Basilides received the Gospel of Matthew; and there is no sufficient proof that he rejected any of the other three: on the contrary, it appears that he wrote a commentary upon the Gospel, so copious as to be divided into twenty-four books.‡

II. The Valentinians appeared about the same time.§ Their heresy consisted in certain notions concerning angelic natures, which can hardly be rendered intelligible to a modern reader. They seem, however, to have acquired as much importance as any of the separatists of that early age. Of this sect, Irenæus, who wrote, A. D. 172, expressly records that they endeavored to fetch arguments for their opinions from the evangelic and apostolic writings.|| Heracleon, one of the most celebrated of the sect, and who lived probably so early as the year 125, wrote commentaries upon Luke and John.¶ Some observations also of his upon Matthew are preserved by Origen.\*\* Nor is there any reason to doubt that he received the whole New Testament.

III. The Carpocratians were also an early heresy, little, if at all, later than the two preceding.†† Some of their opinions resembled what we at this day mean by Socinianism. With respect to the Scriptures, they are specifically charged, by Irenæus and by Epiphanius, with endeavoring to pervert a passage in Matthew, which amounts to a positive proof that they received that Gospel.‡‡ Negatively, they are not accused, by their adversaries, of rejecting any part of the New Testament.

\* The materials of the former part of this section are taken from Dr. Lardner's History of the Heretics, of the first two Centuries, published since his death, with additions, by the Rev. Mr. Hogg, of Exeter, and inserted into the ninth volume of his works, of the edition of 1778.

† Lardner, vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 271.

‡ Ib. p. 350, 351.

¶ Ib. vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 352.

†† Ib. 309.

‡ Ib. p. 305, 306.

|| Ib. vol. i. p. 383.

\*\* Ib. p. 353.

‡‡ Ib. 318.



IV. The Sethians, A. D. 150;\* the Montanists, A. D. 156;† the Marcosians, A. D. 160;‡ Hermogenes, A. D. 180;§ Praxias, A. D. 196;|| Artemon, A. D. 200;¶ Theodotus, A. D. 200; all included under the denomination of heretics, and all engaged in controversies with Catholic Christians, received the Scriptures of the New Testament.

V. Tatian, who lived in the year 172, went into many extravagant opinions, was the founder of a sect called Encratites, and was deeply involved in disputes with the Christians of that age; yet Tatian so received the four Gospels as to compose a harmony from them.

VI. From a writer, quoted by Eusebius, of about the year 300, it is apparent that they who at that time contended for the mere humanity of Christ, argued from the Scriptures; for they are accused by this writer, of making alterations in their copies, in order to favor their opinions.\*\*

VII. Origen's sentiments excited great controversies,—the bishops of Rome and Alexandria, and many others, condemning, the bishops of the east espousing them; yet there is not the smallest question, but that both the advocates and adversaries of these opinions acknowledged the same authority of Scripture. In his time, which the reader will remember was about one hundred and fifty years after the Scriptures were published, many dissensions subsisted amongst Christians, with which they were reproached by Celsus; yet Origen, who has recorded this accusation without contradicting it, nevertheless testifies, that the four Gospels were received *without dispute*, by the whole church of God under heaven.††

VIII. Paul of Samosata, about thirty years after Origen, so distinguished himself in the controversy concerning the nature of Christ, as to be the subject of two councils or synods, assembled at Antioch upon his opinions. Yet he is not charged by his adversaries with rejecting any book of the New Testament. On the contrary, Epiphanius, who wrote a history of heretics a hundred years afterward, says, that Paul endeavored to support his doctrine by texts of Scripture. And Vincentius Lirinensis, A. D. 434, speaking of Paul and other heretics of the same age, has these words: 'Here, perhaps, some one may ask, whether heretics also urge the testimony of Scripture. They urge it indeed, explicitly and vehemently; for you may see them flying through every book of the sacred law.'‡‡

IX. A controversy at the same time existed with the Noetians or Sabellians, who seem to have gone into the opposite extreme from that of Paul of Samosata and his followers. Yet, according to the express testimony of Epiphanius, Sabellius received all the Scriptures. And with both sects Catholic writers constantly allege the

\* Lardner, vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 455.

† Ib. 348.

‡ Ib. 433.

\*\* Ib. vol. iii. p. 46.

†† Ib. vol. xi. p. 158.

† Ib. 482.

§ Ib. 473.

¶ Ib. 466.

‡‡ Ib. vol. iv. p. 642.

Scriptures, and reply to the arguments which their opponents drew from particular texts.

We have here, therefore, a proof, that parties, who were the most opposite and irreconcilable to one another, acknowledged the authority of Scripture with equal deference.

X. And as a general testimony to the same point, may be produced what was said by one of the bishops of the council of Carthage, which was holden a little before this time,—‘I am of opinion that the blasphemous and wicked heretics, who *pervert* the sacred and adorable words of the Scriptures, should be execrated.\*’ Undoubtedly what they perverted they received.

VI. The Millennium, Novatianism, the baptism of heretics, the keeping of Easter, engaged also the attention and divided the opinions of Christians, at and before that time (and, by the way, it may be observed, that such disputes, though on some accounts to be blamed, showed how much men were in earnest upon the subject); yet every one appealed for the grounds of his opinion to Scripture authority. Dionysius of Alexandria, who flourished A. D. 247, describing a conference or public disputation with the Millennarians of Egypt, confesses of them, though their adversary, ‘that they embrace whatever could be made out by good arguments from the Holy Scriptures.’† Novatus, A. D. 251, distinguished by some rigid sentiments concerning the reception of those who had lapsed, and the founder of a numerous sect, in his few remaining works quotes the Gospel with the same respect as other Christians did; and concerning his followers, the testimony of Socrates, who wrote about the year 440, is positive, *viz.* ‘That in the disputes between the Catholics and them, each side endeavored to support itself by the authority of the Divine Scriptures.’‡

XII. The Donatists, who sprung up in the year 328, used the same Scriptures as we do. ‘Produce (saith Augustine) some proof from the Scriptures, whose authority is common to us both.’§

XIII. It is perfectly notorious that, in the Arian controversy, which arose soon after the year 300, both sides appealed to the same Scriptures, and with equal professions of deference and regard. The Arians, in their council of Antioch, A. D. 341, pronounce, that, ‘if any one, contrary to the sound doctrine of the Scriptures, say, that the Son is a creature, as one of the creatures, let him be an anathema.’|| They and the Athanasians mutually accuse each other of using *unscriptural* phrases; which was a mutual acknowledgment of the conclusive authority of Scripture.

XIV. The Priscillianists, A. D. 378,¶ the Pelagians, A. D. 405,\*\* received the same Scriptures as we do.

XV. The testimony of Chrysostom, who lived near the year 400, is so positive in affirmation of the proposition which we maintain,

\* Lardner, vol. xi. p. 839.

† Ib. vol. v. p. 105.

|| Ib. p. 277.

\*\* Ib. vol. xi. p. 52.

† Ib. vol. iv. p. 666.

§ Ib. vol. vii. p. 243.

¶ Ib. vol. ix. p. 325.

that it may form a proper conclusion of the argument. 'The general reception of the Gospels is a proof that their history is true and consistent; for, since the writings of the Gospels, many heresies have arisen, holding opinions contrary to what is contained in them, who yet received the Gospels either entire or in part.\* I am not moved by what may seem a deduction from Chrysostom's testimony, the words, 'entire or in part;' for, if all the parts, which were ever questioned in our Gospels, were given up, it would not affect the miraculous origin of the religion in the smallest degree: *e. g.*

Cerinthus is said by Epiphanius to have received the Gospel of Matthew, but not entire. What the omissions were, does not appear. The common opinion, that he rejected the first two chapters, seems to have been a mistake.† It is agreed, however, by all who have given any account of Cerinthus, that he taught that the Holy Ghost (whether he meant by that name a person or a power) descended upon Jesus at his baptism; that Jesus from this time performed many miracles, and that he appeared after his death. He must have retained therefore the essential parts of the history.

Of all the ancient heretics, the most extraordinary was Marcion.‡ One of his tenets was the rejection of the Old Testament, as proceeding from an inferior and imperfect deity: and in pursuance of this hypothesis he erased from the New, and that, as it should seem, without entering into any critical reasons, every passage which recognized the Jewish Scriptures. He spared not a text which contradicted his opinion. It is reasonable to believe that Marcion treated books as he treated texts; yet this rash and wild controversialist published a recension, or chastised edition, of Saint Luke's Gospel, containing the leading facts, and all which is necessary to authenticate the religion. This example affords proof, that there were always some points, and those the main points, which neither wildness nor rashness, neither the fury of opposition nor the intemperance of controversy, would venture to call in question. There is no reason to believe that Marcion, though full of resentment against the Catholic Christians, ever charged them with forging their books. 'The Gospel of Saint Matthew, the Epistle to the Hebrews, with those of Saint Peter and Saint James, as well as the Old Testament in general (he said), were writings not for Christians but for Jews.'§ This declaration shows the ground upon which Marcion proceeded in his mutilation of the Scriptures, *viz.* his dislike of the passages or the books. Marcion flourished about the year 130.

Dr. Lardner, in his general Review, sums up this head of evidence in the following words: 'Noëtus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius,

\* Lardner, vol. x. p. 316.

† *Ib.* vol. ix. ed. 1788, p. 322.

‡ *Ib.* sect. ii. c. x. Also Michael. vol. i. c. i. sect. xviii.

§ I have transcribed this sentence from Michaelis (p. 38), who has not, however, referred to the authority upon which he attributes these words to Marcion.

Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manicheans,\* Priscillianists, beside Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and divers others, all received most or all the same books of the New Testament which the Catholics received; and agreed in a like respect for them as written by apostles, or their disciples and companions.†

## SECT. VIII.

*The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of Saint Paul, the First Epistle of John, and the First of Peter, were received without doubt by those who doubted concerning the other books which are included in our present canon.*

I STATE this proposition, because, if made out, it shows that the authenticity of their books was a subject amongst the early Christians of consideration and inquiry; and that, where there was cause of doubt, they did doubt; a circumstance which strengthens very much their testimony to such books as were received by them with full acquiescence.

I. Jerome, in his account of Caius, who was probably a presbyter of Rome, and who flourished near the year 200, records of him, that, reckoning up only thirteen epistles of Paul, he says the fourteenth, which is inscribed to the Hebrews, is not his: and then Jerome adds, 'With the Romans to this day it is not looked upon as Paul's.' This agrees in the main with the account given by Eusebius of the same ancient author and his work; except that Eusebius delivers his own remark in more guarded terms: 'And indeed to this very time by some of the Romans, this epistle is not thought to be the apostle's.‡'

II. Origen, about twenty years after Caius, quoting the Epistle to the Hebrews, observes that some might dispute the authority of that epistle; and therefore proceeds to quote to the same point, as *undoubted* books of Scripture, the Gospel of Saint Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians.§ And in another place, this author speaks of the Epistle to the Hebrews thus:—'The account come down to us is various; some saying that Clement, who was bishop of Rome, wrote this epistle; others, that it was Luke, the same who wrote the Gospel and the Acts.' Speaking also, in the same paragraph, of Peter, 'Peter (says he) has left one epistle, acknowledged; let it be granted likewise that he wrote a second, for it is doubted of.' And of John, 'He has also left one epistle, of a very few lines; grant also a second and a third, for all do not allow them to be genuine.' Now let it be noted, that Origen, who thus discriminates, and thus confesses his own doubts, and the

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\* This must be with an exception, however, of Faustus, who lived so late as the year 384.

† Lardner, vol. xii. p. 12.—Dr. Lardner's future inquiries supplied him with many other instances.

‡ Lardner, vol. iii. p. 240.

§ Ib. p. 246.

doubts which subsisted in his time, expressly witnesses concerning the four Gospels, 'that they alone are received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven.\*'

III. Dionysius of Alexandria, in the year 247, doubts concerning the book of Revelation, whether it was written by Saint John; states the grounds of his doubt, represents the diversity of opinion concerning it, in his own time, and before his time.† Yet the same Dionysius uses and collates the four Gospels in a manner which shows that he entertained not the smallest suspicion of *their* authority, and in a manner also which shows that they, and they alone, were received as authentic histories of Christ.‡

IV. But this section may be said to have been framed on purpose to introduce to the reader two remarkable passages extant in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History. The first passage opens with these words:—'Let us observe the writings of the apostle John which are *uncontradicted*; and first of all must be mentioned, as acknowledged of all, the Gospel according to him, well known to all the churches under heaven.' The author then proceeds to relate the occasion of writing the Gospels, and the reason for placing Saint John's the last, manifestly speaking of all the four as parallel in their authority, and in the certainty of their original.§ The second passage is taken from a chapter, the title of which is, 'Of the Scriptures *universally acknowledged*, and of those that are not such.' Eusebius begins his enumeration in the following manner:—'*In the first place*, are to be ranked the sacred four Gospels; then the book of the Acts of the Apostles; after that are to be reckoned the Epistles of Paul. In the next place, that called the First Epistle of John, and the Epistle of Peter, are to be esteemed authentic. After this is to be placed, if it be thought fit, the Revelation of John, about which we shall observe the different opinions at proper seasons. Of the controverted, but yet well known or approved by the most, are, that called the Epistle of James, and that of Jude, and the Second of Peter, and the Second and Third of John, whether they are written by the evangelist, or another of the same name.¶ He then proceeds to reckon up five others, not in our canon, which he calls in one place *spurious*, in another *controverted*, meaning, as appears to me, nearly the same thing by these two words.¶

It is manifest from this passage, that the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles (the parts of Scripture with which our concern principally lies), were acknowledged without dispute, even by those who raised objections, or entertained doubts, about some other parts

\* Lardner, vol. ii. p. 234.

† Ib. vol. iv. p. 670.

‡ Ib. p. 661.

§ Ib. vol. viii. p. 90.

¶ Ib. p. 39.

¶ That Eusebius could not intend, by the word rendered '*spurious*,' what we at present mean by it, is evident from a clause in this very chapter, where, speaking of the Gospels of Peter, and Thomas, and Matthias, and some others, he says, 'They are not so much as to be reckoned among the *spurious*, but are to be rejected as altogether absurd and impious.' Vol. viii. p. 98.

of the same collection. But the passage proves something more than this. The author was extremely conversant in the writings of Christians, which had been published from the commencement of the institution to his own time : and it was from these writings that he drew his knowledge of the character and reception of the books in question. That Eusebius recurred to this medium of information, and that he had examined with attention this species of proof, is shown, first, by a passage in the very chapter we are quoting, in which, speaking of the books which he calls spurious, 'None (says he) of the ecclesiastical writers, in the succession of the apostles, have vouchsafed to make any mention of them in their writings;' and, secondly, by another passage of the same work, wherein, speaking of the First Epistle of Peter, 'This (says he) the presbyters of ancient times have quoted in their writings as undoubtedly genuine;\*' and then, speaking of some other writings bearing the name of Peter, 'We know (he says) that they have not been delivered down to us in the number of Catholic writings, forasmuch as no ecclesiastical writer of the ancients, or of our times, has made use of testimonies out of them.' 'But in the progress of this history,' the author proceeds, we shall make it our business to show, together with the successions from the apostles, what ecclesiastical writers, in every age, have used such writings as these which are contradicted, and what they have said with regard to the Scriptures received in the New Testament, *and acknowledged by all*, and with regard to those which are not such.†

After this it is reasonable to believe, that when Eusebius states the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, as uncontradicted, uncontested, and acknowledged by all; and when he places them in opposition, not only to those which were spurious, in our sense of that term, but to those which were controverted, and even to those which were well known and approved by many, yet doubted of by some; he represents not only the sense of his own age, but the result of the evidence which the writings of prior ages, from the apostle's time to his own, had furnished to his inquiries. The opinion of Eusebius and his contemporaries appears to have been founded upon the testimony of writers whom they *then* called ancient: and we may observe, that such of the works of these writers as have come down to our times, entirely confirm the judgment, and support the distinction, which Eusebius proposes. The books which he calls 'books universally acknowledged,' are in fact used and quoted in the remaining works of Christian writers, during the two hundred and fifty years between the apostles' time and that of Eusebius, much more frequently than, and in a different manner from, those, the authority of which, he tells us, was disputed.

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\* Lardner, vol. viii. p. 99.

† Ib. p. 111.

## SECT. IX.

*Our historical Scriptures were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.*

NEAR the middle of the second century, Celsus, a heathen philosopher, wrote a professed treatise against Christianity. To this treatise, Origen, who came about fifty years after him, published an answer, in which he frequently recites his adversary's words and arguments. The work of Celsus is lost; but that of Origen remains. Origen appears to have given us the words of Celsus, where he professes to give them, very faithfully; and, amongst other reasons for thinking so, this is one, that the objection, as stated by him from Celsus, is sometimes stronger than his own answer. I think it also probable, that Origen, in his answer, has retailed a large portion of the work of Celsus: 'That it may not be suspected (he says) that we pass by any chapters, because we have no answers at hand, I have thought it best, according to my ability, to confute every thing proposed by him, not so much observing the natural order of things, as the order which he has taken himself.'\*

Celsus wrote about one hundred years after the Gospels were published; and therefore any notices of these books from him are extremely important for their antiquity. They are, however, rendered more so by the character of the author; for, the reception, credit, and notoriety, of these books must have been well established amongst Christians, to have made them subjects of animadversion and opposition by strangers and by enemies. It evinces the truth of what Chrysostom, two centuries afterward, observed, that 'the Gospels, when written, were not hidden in a corner, or buried in obscurity, but they were made known to all the world, before enemies as well as others, even as they are now.'†

1. Celsus, or the Jew whom he personates, uses these words:—'I could say many things concerning the affairs of Jesus, and those, too, different from those written by the disciples of Jesus; but I purposely omit them.'‡ Upon this passage it has been rightly observed, that it is not easy to believe, that if Celsus could have contradicted the disciples upon good evidence in any material point, he would have omitted to do so, and that the assertion is, what Origen calls it, a mere oratorical flourish.

It is sufficient, however, to prove, that, in the time of Celsus, there were books well known, and allowed to be written by the disciples of Jesus, which books contained a history of him. By the term *disciples*, Celsus does not mean the followers of Jesus in general; for them he calls Christians, or believers, or the like; but those

\* Orig. cont. Cels. l. i. sect. xli.

† In Matt. Hom. 1. 7.

‡ Lardner, Jewish and Heathen Test. vol. ii. p. 274.

who had been taught by Jesus himself, *i. e.* his apostles and companions.

2. In another passage, Celsus accuses the Christians of altering the Gospel.\* The accusation refers to some variations in the readings of particular passages; for Celsus goes on to object, that when they are pressed hard, and one reading has been confuted, they disown that, and fly to another. We cannot perceive from Origen, that Celsus specified any particular instances, and without such specification the charge is of no value. But the true conclusion to be drawn from it is, that there were in the hands of the Christians, histories, which were even then of some standing: for, various readings and corruptions do not take place in recent productions.

The former quotation, the reader will remember, proves that these books were composed by the disciples of Jesus, strictly so called; the present quotation shows, that, though objections were taken by the adversaries of the religion to the integrity of these books, none were made to their genuineness.

3. In a third passage, the Jew, whom Celsus introduces, shuts up an argument in this manner:—‘These things then we have alleged to you out of *your own writings*, not needing any other weapons.’† It is manifest that this boast proceeds upon the supposition that the books, over which the writer affects to triumph, possessed an authority by which Christians confessed themselves to be bound.

4. That the books to which Celsus refers were no other than our present Gospels, is made out by his allusions to various passages still found in these Gospels. Celsus takes notice of the *genealogies*, which fixes two of these Gospels; of the precepts, Resist not him that injures you, and, If a man strike thee on the one cheek, offer to him the other also;‡ of the woes denounced by Christ; of his predictions; of his saying, that it is impossible to serve two masters;§ of the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the reed in his hand; of the blood that flowed from the body of Jesus upon the cross,|| which circumstance is recorded by John alone; and (what is *instar omnium* for the purpose for which we produce it) of the difference in the accounts given of the resurrection by the evangelists, some mentioning two angels at the sepulchre, others only one.¶

It is extremely material to remark, that Celsus not only perpetually referred to the accounts of Christ contained in the four Gospels,\*\* but that he referred to no other accounts; that he founded none of his objections to Christianity upon any thing delivered in spurious Gospels.

II. What Celsus was in the second century, Porphyry became in the third. His work, which was a large and formal treatise against the Christian religion, is not extant. We must be content therefore to gather his objections from Christian writers, who have noticed in

\* Lardner, Jewish and Heathen Test. vol. ii. p. 275.

† *Ib.* p. 276.

‡ *Ibid.* § *Ib.* p. 277.

|| *Ib.* p. 280, 281.

¶ *Ib.* p. 283.

\*\* The particulars, of which the above are only a few, are well collected by Mr. Bryant, p. 140.



order to answer them; and enough remains of this species of information, to prove completely, that Porphyry's animadversions were directed against the contents of our present Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles; Porphyry considering that to overthrow *them* was to overthrow the religion. Thus he objects to the repetition of a generation in Saint Matthew's genealogy; to Matthew's call; to the quotation of a text from Isaiah, which is found in a psalm ascribed to Asaph; to the calling of the lake of Tiberias a sea; to the expression in Saint Matthew, 'the abomination of desolation;' to the variation in Matthew and Mark upon the text, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness,' Matthew citing it from Isaias, Mark from the Prophets; to John's application of the term 'Word;' to Christ's change of intention about going up to the feast of tabernacles (John vii. 8); to the judgment denounced by Saint Peter upon Ananias and Sapphira, which he calls an imprecation of death.\*

The instances here alleged, serve, in some measure, to show the nature of Porphyry's objections, and prove that Porphyry had read the Gospels with that sort of attention which a writer would employ who regarded them as the depositaries of the religion which he attacked. Beside these specifications, there exists, in the writings of ancient Christians, general evidence, that the places of Scripture upon which Porphyry had remarked were very numerous.

In some of the above-cited examples, Porphyry, speaking of Saint Matthew, calls him *your evangelist*; he also uses the term evangelists in the plural number. What was said of Celsus, is true likewise of Porphyry, that it does not appear that he considered any history of Christ, except these, as having authority with Christians.

III. A third great writer against the Christian religion was the emperor Julian, whose work was composed about a century after that of Porphyry.

In various long extracts, transcribed from this work by Cyril and Jerome, it appears,† that Julian noticed *by name* Matthew and Luke, in the difference between their genealogies of Christ; that he objected to Matthew's application of the prophecy, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son,' (ii. 15.) and to that of 'A virgin shall conceive;' (i. 23.) that he recited sayings of Christ, and various passages of his history, in the very words of the evangelists; in particular, that Jesus healed lame and blind people, and exorcised demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany; that he alleged, that none of Christ's disciples ascribed to him the creation of the world, except John; that neither Paul, nor Matthew, nor Luke, nor Mark, have dared to call Jesus, God; that John wrote later than the other evangelists, and at a time when a great number of men in the cities of Greece and Italy were converted; that he alludes to the conversion of Cornelius and of Sergius Paulus, to Peter's vision, to the circular letter sent by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, which are all recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: by which

\* Jewish and Heathen Test. vol. iii. p. 166, &c.

† Ib. vol. iv. p. 77, &c.

quoting of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and by quoting no other, Julian shows that these were the historical books, and the only historical books, received by Christians as of authority, and as the authentic memoirs of Jesus Christ, of his apostles, and of the doctrines taught by them. But Julian's testimony does something more than represent the judgment of the Christian church in his time. It discovers also his own. He himself expressly states the early date of these records; he calls them by the names which they now bear. He all along supposes, he nowhere attempts to question, their genuineness.

The argument in favor of the books of the New Testament, drawn from the notice taken of their contents by the early writers against the religion, is very considerable. It proves that the accounts, which Christians had then, were the accounts which we have now; that our present Scriptures were theirs. It proves, moreover, that neither Celsus in the second, Porphyry in the third, nor Julian in the fourth century, suspected the authenticity of these books, or even insinuated that Christians were mistaken in the authors to whom they ascribed them. Not one of them expressed an opinion upon this subject different from that which was holden by Christians. And when we consider how much it would have availed them to have cast a doubt upon this point, if they could; and how ready they showed themselves to be, to take every advantage in their power; and that they were all men of learning and inquiry; their concession, or rather their suffrage, upon the subject, is extremely valuable.

In the case of Porphyry, it is made still stronger, by the consideration that he did in fact support himself by this species of objection, when he saw any room for it, or when his acuteness could supply any pretence for alleging it. The prophecy of Daniel he attacked upon this very ground of spuriousness, insisting that it was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, and maintains his charge of forgery by some far-fetched indeed, but very subtle criticisms. Concerning the writings of the New Testament, no trace of this suspicion is anywhere to be found in him.\*

## SECT. X.

*Formal catalogues of authentic Scriptures were published, in all which our present sacred histories were included.*

THIS species of evidence comes later than the rest; as it was not natural that catalogues of any particular class of books should be put forth until Christian writings became numerous; or until some writings showed themselves, claiming titles which did not belong to them, and thereby rendering it necessary to separate books of au-

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\* Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i. p. 43. Marsh's Translation.

thority from others. But, when it does appear, it is extremely satisfactory; the catalogues, though numerous, and made in countries at a wide distance from one another, differing very little, differing in nothing which is material, and all containing the four Gospels. To this last article there is no exception.

I. In the writings of Origen which remain, and in some extracts preserved by Eusebius, from works of his which are now lost, there are enumerations of the books of Scripture, in which the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are distinctly and honorably specified, and in which no books appear beside what are now received.\* The reader, by this time, will easily-recollect that the date of Origen's works is A. D. 230.

II. Athanasius, about a century afterward, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament in form, containing our Scriptures and no others; of which he says, 'In these alone the doctrine of religion is taught; let no man add to them or take any thing from them.†

III. About twenty years after Athanasius, Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, set forth a catalogue of the books of Scripture, publicly read at that time in the church of Jerusalem, exactly the same as ours, except that the 'Revelation' is omitted.‡

IV. And fifteen years after Cyril, the council of Laodicea delivered an authoritative catalogue of Canonical Scripture, like Cyril's, the same as ours, with the omission of the 'Revelation.'

V. Catalogues now became frequent. Within thirty years after the last date, that is, from the year 363 to near the conclusion of the fourth century, we have catalogues by Epiphanius,§ by Gregory Nazianzen,|| by Philaster bishop of Brescia in Italy,¶ by Amphilochius bishop of Iconium, all, as they are sometimes called, *clean* catalogues, (that is, they admit no books into the number beside what we now receive), and all, for every purpose of historic evidence, the same as ours.\*\*

VI. Within the same period, Jerome, the most learned Christian writer of his age, delivered a catalogue of the books of the New Testament, recognizing every book now received, with the intimation of a doubt concerning the Epistle to the Hebrews alone, and taking not the least notice of any book which is not now received.††

VII. Contemporary with Jerome, who lived in Palestine, was Saint Augustine, in Africa, who published likewise a catalogue, without joining to the Scriptures, as books of authority, any other ecclesiastical writing whatever, and without omitting one which we at this day acknowledge.‡‡

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. iii. p. 234, &c. vol. viii. p. 196.

† Ib. vol. viii. p. 223.

‡ Ib. p. 270.

§ Ib. p. 368.

|| Ib. vol. ix. p. 132.

¶ Ib. p. 373.

\*\* Epiphanius omits the Acts of the Apostles. This must have been an accidental mistake, either in him or in some copyist of his work; for he elsewhere expressly refers to this book, and ascribes it to Luke.

†† Lardner, Cred. vol. x. p. 77.

‡‡ Ib. p. 213.

VIII. And with these concurs another contemporary writer, Rufen, presbyter of Aquileia, whose catalogue, like theirs, is perfect and unmixed, and concludes with these remarkable words: 'These are the volumes which the fathers have included in the canon, and out of which they would have us prove the doctrine of our faith.'\*

## SECT. XI.

*These propositions cannot be predicated of any of those books which are commonly called the Apocryphal Books of the New Testament.*

I do not know that the objection taken from apocryphal writings is at present much relied upon by scholars. But there are many, who, hearing that various Gospels existed in ancient times under the names of the apostles, may have taken up a notion, that the selection of our present Gospels from the rest, was rather an arbitrary or accidental choice, than founded in any clear and certain cause of preference. To these it may be very useful to know the truth of the case. I observe, therefore,

I. That, beside our Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, no Christian history, claiming to be written by an apostle or apostolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Christ, by any writer now extant, or known; or, if quoted, is not quoted with marks of censure and rejection.

I have not advanced this assertion without inquiry; and I doubt not, but that the passages cited by Mr. Jones and Dr. Lardner, under the several titles which the apocryphal books bear; or a reference to the places where they are mentioned as collected in a very accurate table, published in the year 1773, by the Rev. J. Atkinson, will make out the truth of the proposition to the satisfaction of every fair and competent judgment. If there be any book which may seem to form an exception to the observation, it is a Hebrew Gospel, which was circulated under the various titles of the Gospel according to the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazarenes, of the Ebionites, sometimes called of the Twelve, by some ascribed to Saint Matthew. This Gospel is *once*, and only *once*, cited by Clemens Alexandrinus, who lived, the reader will remember, in the latter part of the second century, and which same Clement quotes one or other of our four Gospels in almost every page of his work. It is twice mentioned by Origen, A. D. 230; and both times with marks of diminution and discredit. And this is the ground upon which the exception stands. But what is still more material to observe is, that this Gospel, in the main, agreed with our present Gospel of Saint Matthew.†

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\* Lardner, Cred. vol. x. 187.

† In applying to this Gospel, what Jerome in the latter end of the fourth century has mentioned of a Hebrew Gospel, I think it probable that we sometimes confound it with a Hebrew copy of Saint Matthew's Gospel, whether an original or version, which was then extant.

Now if, with this account of the apocryphal Gospels, we compare what we have read concerning the canonical Scriptures in the preceding sections; or even recollect that general but well-founded assertion of Dr. Lardner, 'That in the remaining works of Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, who all lived in the first two centuries, there are more and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament, than of all the works of Cicero, by writers of all characters, for several ages;\*' and if to this we add, that, notwithstanding the loss of many works of the primitive times of Christianity, we have, within the above-mentioned period, the remains of Christian writers, who lived in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, the part of Africa that used the Latin tongue, in Crete, Greece, Italy, and Gaul, in all which remains, references are found to our evangelists; I apprehend, that we shall perceive a clear and broad line of division, between those writings, and all others pretending to similar authority.

II. But beside certain *histories* which assumed the names of apostles, and which were forgeries properly so called, there were some other Christian writings, in the whole or in part of an historical nature, which, though not forgeries, are denominated apocryphal, as being of uncertain or of no authority.

Of this second class of writings, I have found only two which are noticed by any author of the first three centuries, without express terms of condemnation; and these are, the one, a book entitled the *Preaching of Peter*, quoted repeatedly by Clemens Alexandrinus, A. D. 196; the other, a book entitled the *Revelation of Peter*, upon which the above-mentioned Clemens Alexandrinus is said, by Eusebius, to have written notes; and which is twice cited in a work still extant, ascribed to the same author.

I conceive, therefore, that the proposition we have before advanced, even after it had been subjected to every exception, of every kind, that can be alleged, separates, by a wide interval, our historical Scriptures from all other writings which profess to give an account of the same subject.

We may be permitted however to add,

1. That there is no evidence that any spurious or apocryphal books whatever existed in the first century of the Christian era, in which century all our historical books are proved to have been extant. 'There are no quotations of any such books in the apostolical fathers, by whom I mean Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Hermas, Ignatius, and Polycarp, whose writings reach from about the year of our Lord 70, to the year 108 (and some of whom have quoted each and every one of our historical Scriptures); I say this,' adds Dr. Lardner, 'because I think it has been proved.†'

2. These apocryphal writings were not read in the churches of Christians;

3. Were not admitted into their volume;

4. Do not appear in their catalogues;

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. xii. p. 53.

† Ib. vol. xii. p. 158.

5. Were not noticed by their adversaries ;
6. Were not alleged by different parties as of authority in their controversies ;
7. Were not the subjects, amongst them, of commentaries, versions, collations, expositions.

Finally ; beside the silence of three centuries, or evidence, within that time, of their rejection, they were, with a consent nearly universal, reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages.

Although it be made out by these observations, that the books in question never obtained any degree of credit and notoriety which can place them in competition with our Scriptures ; yet it appears, from the writings of the fourth century, that many such existed in that century, and in the century preceding it. It may be difficult at this distance of time to account for their origin. Perhaps the most probable explication is, that they were in general composed with a design of making a profit by the sale. Whatever treated of the subject, would find purchasers. It was an advantage taken of the pious curiosity of unlearned Christians. With a view to the same purpose, they were many of them adapted to the particular opinions of particular sects, which would naturally promote their circulation amongst the favorers of those opinions. After all, they were probably much more obscure than we imagine. Except the Gospel according to the Hebrews, there is none of which we hear more than the Gospel of the Egyptians ; yet there is good reason to believe that Clement, a presbyter of Alexandria in Egypt, A. D. 184, and a man of almost universal reading, had never seen it.\* A Gospel according to Peter, was another of the most ancient books of this kind ; yet Serapion, bishop of Antioch, A. D. 200, had not read it, when he heard of such a book being in the hands of the Christians of Rhossus in Cilicia ; and speaks of obtaining a sight of this Gospel from some sectaries who used it.† Even of the Gospel of the Hebrews, which confessedly stands at the head of the catalogue, Jérôme, at the end of the fourth century, was glad to procure a copy by the favor of the Nazarenes of Berea. Nothing of this sort ever happened, or could have happened concerning our Gospels.

One thing is observable of all the apocryphal Christian writings, viz. that they proceed upon the same fundamental history of Christ and his apostles, as that which is disclosed in our Scriptures. The mission of Christ, his power of working miracles, his communication of that power to the apostles, his passion, death, and resurrection, are assumed or asserted by every one of them. The names under which some of them came forth, are the names of men of eminence in our histories. What these books give, are not contradictions, but unauthorized additions. The principal facts are supposed, the principal agents the same ; which shows, that these points were too much fixed to be altered or disputed.

If there be any book of this description, which appears to have

\* Jones, vol. i. p. 243.

† Lardner, Cred. vol. ii. p. 557.

imposed upon some considerable number of learned Christians, it is the Sibylline oracles; but, when we reflect upon the circumstances which facilitated that imposture, we shall cease to wonder either at the attempt or its success. It was at that time universally understood, that such a prophetic writing existed. Its contents were kept secret. This situation afforded to some one a hint, as well as an opportunity, to give out a writing under this name, favorable to the already established persuasion of Christians, and which writing, by the aid and recommendation of these circumstances, would in some degree, it is probable, be received. Of the ancient forgery we know but little: what is now produced, could not, in my opinion, have imposed upon any one. It is nothing else than the Gospel history, woven into verse; perhaps was at first rather a fiction than a forgery; an exercise of ingenuity, more than an attempt to deceive.

## CHAP. X.

### *Recapitulation.*

THE reader will now be pleased to recollect, that the two points which form the subject of our present discussion, are, first, that the Founder of Christianity, his associates, and immediate followers, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings; secondly, that they did so, in attestation of the miraculous history recorded in our Scriptures, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of that history.

The argument, by which these two propositions have been maintained by us, stands thus:

No historical fact, I apprehend, is more certain, than that the original propagators of Christianity voluntarily subjected themselves to lives of fatigue, danger, and suffering, in the prosecution of their undertaking. The nature of the undertaking; the character of the person employed in it; the opposition of their tenets to the fixed opinions and expectations of the country in which they first advanced them; their undissembled condemnation of the religion of all other countries; their total want of power, authority, or force; render it in the highest degree probable that this must have been the case. The probability is increased, by what we know of the fate of the Founder of the institution, who was put to death for his attempt; and by what we also know of the cruel treatment of the converts to the institution, within thirty years after its commencement; both which points are attested by heathen writers, and, being once admitted, leave it very incredible that the primitive emissaries of the religion, who exercised their ministry, first, amongst the people who had destroyed their Master, and, afterward, amongst those who persecuted their converts, should themselves escape with impunity, or pursue their purpose in ease and safety. This probability, thus sustained by foreign testimony, is advanced, I think, to historical certainty, by the evidence of our own books; by the ac-

counts of a writer who was the companion of the persons whose sufferings he relates; by the letters of the persons themselves; by predictions of persecutions ascribed to the Founder of the religion, which predictions would not have been inserted in this history, much less have been studiously dwelt upon, if they had not accorded with the event, and which, even if falsely ascribed to him, could only have been so ascribed, because the event suggested them; lastly, by incessant exhortations to fortitude and patience, and by an earnestness, repetition, and urgency, upon the subject, which were unlikely to have appeared, if there had not been, at the time, some extraordinary call for the exercise of these virtues.

It is made out also, I think, with sufficient evidence, that both the teachers and converts of the religion, in consequence of their new profession, took up a new course of life and behavior.

The next great question is, what they did this *for*. That it was *for* a miraculous story of some kind or other, is to my apprehension extremely manifest; because, as to the fundamental article, the designation of the person, *viz.* that this particular person, Jesus of Nazareth, ought to be received as the Messiah, or as a messenger from God, they neither had, nor could have, any thing but miracles to stand upon. That the exertions and sufferings of the apostles were *for* the story which we have now, is proved by the consideration that this story is transmitted to us by two of their own number, and by two others personally connected with them; that the particularity of the narrative proves, that the writers claimed to possess circumstantial information, that from their situation they had full opportunity of acquiring such information; that they certainly, at least, knew what their colleagues, their companions, their masters, taught; that each of these books contains enough to prove the truth of the religion; that, if any one of them therefore be genuine, it is sufficient; that the genuineness, however, of all of them is made out, as well by the general arguments which evince the genuineness of the most undisputed remains of antiquity, as also by peculiar and specific proofs, *viz.* by citations from them in writings belonging to a period immediately contiguous to that in which they were published; by the distinguished regard paid by early Christians to the authority of these books (which regard was manifested by their collecting of them into a volume, appropriating to that volume titles of peculiar respect, translating them into various languages, digesting them into harmonies, writing commentaries upon them, and, still more conspicuously, by the reading of them in their public assemblies in all parts of the world); by a universal agreement with respect to *these* books, whilst doubts were entertained concerning some others; by contending sects appealing to them; by the early adversaries of the religion not disputing their genuineness, but, on the contrary, treating them as the depositaries of the history upon which the religion was founded; by many formal catalogues of these, as of certain and authoritative writings, published in different and distant parts of the Christian world; lastly, by the ab-



sence or defect of the above-cited topics of evidence, when applied to any other histories of the same subject.

These are strong arguments to prove, that the books actually proceeded from the authors whose names they bear (and have always borne, for there is not a particle of evidence to show that they ever went under any other); but the strict genuineness of the books is perhaps more than is necessary to the support of our proposition. For even supposing that, by reason of the silence of antiquity, or the loss of records, we know not who were the writers of the four Gospels, yet the fact, that they were received as authentic accounts of the transaction upon which the religion rested, and were received as such by Christians, at or near the age of the apostles, by those whom the apostles had taught, and by societies which apostles had founded; this fact, I say, connected with the consideration, that they are corroborative of each other's testimony, and that they are farther corroborated by another contemporary history, taking up the story where they had left it, and, in a narrative built upon that story, accounting for the rise and production of changes in the world, the effects of which subsist at this day; connected, moreover, with the confirmation which they receive from letters written by the apostles themselves, which both assume the same general story, and, as often as occasions lead them to do so, allude to particular parts of it; and connected also with the reflection, that if the apostles delivered any different story, it is lost (the present and no other being referred to by a series of Christian writers, down from their age to our own; being likewise recognized in a variety of institutions, which prevailed early and universally, amongst the disciples of the religion); and that so great a change, as the oblivion of one story and the substitution of another, under such circumstances, could not have taken place; this evidence would be deemed, I apprehend, sufficient to prove concerning these books, that, whoever were the authors of them, they exhibit the story which the apostles told, and for which, consequently, they acted, and they suffered.

If it be so, the religion must be true. These men could not be deceivers. By only bearing testimony, they might have avoided all these sufferings, and have lived quietly. Would men in such circumstances pretend to have seen what they never saw; assert facts which they had no knowledge of; go about lying, to teach virtue; and, though not only convinced of Christ's being an impostor, but having seen the success of his imposture in his crucifixion, yet persist in carrying it on; and so persist, as to bring upon themselves, for nothing, and with a full knowledge of the consequence, enmity and hatred, danger and death?

## PROPOSITION II.

Our first proposition was, '*That there is satisfactory evidence that many, pretending to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts; and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct.*' Our second proposition, and which now remains to be treated of, is,

*'That there is not satisfactory evidence, that persons pretending to be original witnesses of any other similar miracles, have acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts.'*

## CHAP. I.

I ENTER upon this part of my argument, by declaring how far my belief in miraculous accounts goes. If the reformers in the time of Wickliffe, or of Luther; or those of England, in the time of Henry the Eighth, or of queen Mary; or the founders of our religious sects since, such as were Mr. Whitfield and Mr. Wesley in our own times; had undergone the life of toil and exertion, of danger and sufferings, which we know that many of them did undergo, for a miraculous story; that is to say, if they had founded their public ministry upon the allegation of miracles wrought within their own knowledge, and upon narratives which could not be resolved into delusion or mistake; and if it had appeared, that their conduct really had its origin in these accounts, I should have believed them. Or, to borrow an instance which will be familiar to every one of my readers, if the late Mr. Howard had undertaken his labors and journeys in attestation, and in consequence of a clear and sensible miracle, I should have believed him also. Or, to represent the same thing under a third supposition; if Socrates had professed to perform public miracles at Athens; if the friends of Socrates, Phædo, Cebes, Crito, and Simmias, together with Plato, and many of his followers, relying upon the attestations which these miracles afforded to his pretensions, had, at the hazard of their lives, and the certain expense of their ease and tranquillity, gone about Greece, after his death, to publish and propagate his doctrines: and if these things had come to our knowledge, in the same way as that in which the life of Socrates is now transmitted to us, through the hands of his companions and disciples, that is, by writings received without doubt as theirs, from the age in which they were published to the present, I should have believed this likewise. And my belief would, in each case, be much strengthened, if the subject of the mission were of importance to the conduct and happiness of human life; if it testified any thing which it behoved mankind to know from such authority; if the nature of what it delivered, required the sort of proof

which it alleged; if the occasion was adequate to the interposition, the end worthy of the means. In the last case, my faith would be much confirmed, if the effects of the transaction *remained*; more especially, if a change had been wrought, at the time, in the opinion and conduct of such numbers, as to lay the foundation of an institution, and of a system of doctrines, which had since overspread the greatest part of the civilized world. I should have believed, I say, the testimony, in these cases; yet none of them do more than come up to the apostolic history.

If any one choose to call assent to its evidence credulity, it is at least incumbent upon him to produce examples in which the same evidence hath turned out to be fallacious. And this contains the precise question which we are now to agitate.

In stating the comparison between our evidence, and what our adversaries may bring into competition with ours, we will divide the distinctions which we wish to propose into two kinds,—those which relate to the proof, and those which relate to the miracles. Under the former head we may lay out of the case,

I. Such accounts of supernatural events as are found only in histories by some ages posterior to the transaction, and of which it is evident that the historian could know little more than his reader. Ours is contemporary history. This difference alone removes out of our way, the miraculous history of Pythagoras, who lived five hundred years before the Christian era, written by Porphyry and Jamblicus, who lived three hundred years after that era; the prodigies of Livy's history; the fables of the heroic ages; the whole of the Greek and Roman, as well as of the Gothic mythology; a great part of the legendary history of Popish saints, the very best attested of which is extracted from the certificates that are exhibited during the process of their canonization, a ceremony which seldom takes place till a century after their deaths. It applies also with considerable force to the miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, which are contained in a solitary history of his life, published by Philostratus, above a hundred years after his death; and in which, whether Philostratus had any prior account to guide him, depends upon his single unsupported assertion. Also to some of the miracles of the third century, especially to one extraordinary instance, the account of Gregory, bishop of Neocesarea, called Thaumaturgus, delivered in the writings of Gregory of Nyssen, who lived one hundred and thirty years after the subject of his panegyric.

The value of this circumstance is shown to have been accurately exemplified in the history of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the order of Jesuits.\* His life, written by a companion of his, and by one of the order, was published about fifteen years after his death. In which life, the author, so far from ascribing any miracles to Ignatius, industriously states the reason why he was not invested with any such power. The life was republished fifteen years afterward, with the addition of many circumstances which were the fruit, the

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\* Douglas's Criterion of Miracles, p. 74.

author says, of farther inquiry, and of diligent examination ; but still with a total silence about miracles. When Ignatius had been dead nearly sixty years, the Jesuits, conceiving a wish to have the founder of their order placed in the Roman calendar, began, as it should seem, for the first time, to attribute to him a catalogue of miracles, which could not then be distinctly disproved ; and which there was, in those who governed the church, a strong disposition to admit upon the slenderest proofs.

II. We may lay out of the case, accounts published in one country, of what passed in a distant country, without any proof that such accounts were known or received at home. In the case of Christianity, Judea, which was the scene of the transaction, was the centre of the mission. The story was published in the place in which it was acted. The church of Christ was first planted at Jerusalem itself. With that church, others corresponded. From thence the primitive teachers of the institution went forth ; thither they assembled. The church of Jerusalem, and the several churches of Judea, subsisted from the beginning, and for many ages ;\* received also the same books and the same accounts, as other churches did.

This distinction disposes, amongst others, of the above-mentioned miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, most of which are related to have been performed in India ; no evidence remaining that either the miracles ascribed to him, or the history of those miracles, were ever heard of in India. Those of Francis Xavier, the Indian missionary, with many others of the Romish breviary, are liable to the same objection, *viz.* that the accounts of them were published at a vast distance from the supposed scene of the wonders.†

III. We lay out of the case *transient* rumors. Upon the first publication of an extraordinary account, or even of an article of ordinary intelligence, no one, who is not personally acquainted with the transaction, can know whether it be true or false, because any man may publish any story. It is in the future confirmation, or contradiction, of the account ; in its permanency, or its disappearance ; its dying away into silence, or its increasing in notoriety ; its being followed up by subsequent accounts, and being repeated in different and independent accounts ; that solid truth is distinguished from fugitive lies. This distinction is altogether on the side of Christianity. The story did not drop. On the contrary, it was succeeded by a train of action and events dependent upon it. The accounts, which we have in our hands, were composed after the first reports must have subsided. They were followed by a train of writings upon the subject. The historical testimonies of the transaction were many and various, and connected with letters, discourses,

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\* The succession of many eminent bishops of Jerusalem in the first three centuries, is distinctly preserved ; as Alexander, A. D. 212, who succeeded Narcissus, then 116 years old.

† Douglas's Crit. p. 84.

controverses, apologies, successively produced by the same transaction.

IV. We may lay out of the case what I call *naked* history. It has been said, that if the prodigies of the Jewish history had been found only in fragments of Manetho, or Berosus, we should have paid no regard to them: and I am willing to admit this. If we knew nothing of the fact, but from the fragment; if we possessed no proof that these accounts had been credited and acted upon, from times, probably, as ancient as the accounts themselves; if we had no visible effects connected with the history, no subsequent or collateral testimony to confirm it; under these circumstances, I think that it would be undeserving of credit. But this certainly is not our case. In appreciating the evidence of Christianity, the books are to be combined with the institution; with the prevalency of the religion at this day; with the time and place of its origin, which are acknowledged points; with the circumstances of its rise and progress, as collected from external history; with the fact of our present books being received by the votaries of the institution from the beginning; with that of other books coming after these, filled with accounts of effects and consequences resulting from the transaction, or referring to the transaction, or built upon it; lastly, with the consideration of the number and variety of the books themselves, the different writers from which they proceed, the different views with which they were written, so disagreeing as to repel the suspicion of confederacy, so agreeing as to show that they were founded in a common original, *i. e.* in a story substantially the same. Whether this proof be satisfactory or not, it is properly a cumulation of evidence, by no means a naked or solitary record.

V. A mark of historical truth, although only in a certain way, and to a certain degree, is *particularity*, in names, dates, places, circumstances, and in the order of events preceding or following the transaction: of which kind, for instance, is the particularity in the description of Saint Paul's voyage and shipwreck, in the 27th chapter of the Acts; which no man, I think, can read without being convinced that the writer was there; and also in the account of the cure and examination of the blind man, in the ninth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, which bears every mark of personal knowledge on the part of the historian.\* I do not deny that fiction has often the particularity of truth; but then it is of studied and elaborate fiction, or of a formal attempt to deceive, that we observe this. Since, however, experience proves that particularity is not confined to truth, I have stated that it is a proof of truth only to a certain extent, *i. e.* it reduces the question to this, whether we can depend or not upon the *probability* of the relater? which is a considerable advance in our present argument; for an express attempt to deceive, in which case alone particularity can appear without truth, is charged upon the evangelists by few. If the historian acknowledge

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\* Both these chapters ought to be read for the sake of this very observation.

himself to have received his intelligence from others, the particularity of the narrative shows, *prima facie*, the accuracy of his inquiries, and the fullness of his information. This remark belongs to Saint Luke's history. Of the particularity which we allege, many examples may be found in all the Gospels. And it is very difficult to conceive, that such numerous particularities, as are almost everywhere to be met with in the Scriptures, should be raised out of nothing, or be spun out of the imagination without any fact to go upon.\*

It is to be remarked, however, that this particularity is only to be looked for in direct history. It is not natural in references or allusions, which yet, in other respects, often afford, as far as they go, the most unsuspicious evidence.

VI. We lay out of the case such stories of supernatural events, as require, on the part of the hearer, nothing more than an *otiose* assent; stories upon which nothing depends, in which no interest is involved, nothing is to be done or changed in consequence of believing them. Such stories are credited, if the careless assent that is given to them deserve that name, more by the indolence of the hearer, than by his judgment: or, though not much credited, are passed from one to another without inquiry or resistance. To this case, and to this case alone, belongs what is called the love of the marvellous. I have never known it carry men farther. Men do not suffer persecution from the love of the marvellous. Of the indifferent nature we are speaking of, are most vulgar errors and popular superstitions: most, for instance, of the current reports of apparitions. Nothing depends upon their being true or false. But not, surely, of this kind were the alleged miracles of Christ and his apostles. They decided, if true, the most important question upon which the human mind can fix its anxiety. They claimed to regulate the opinions of mankind, upon subjects in which they are not only deeply concerned, but usually refractory and obstinate. Men could not be utterly careless in such a case as this. If a Jew took up the story, he found his darling partiality to his own nation and law wounded; if a Gentile, he found his idolatry and polytheism reprobated and condemned. Whoever entertained the account, whether Jew or Gentile, could not avoid the following reflection:—‘If these things be true, I must give up the opinions and principles in which I have been brought up, the religion in which my fathers lived and

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\* ‘There is always some truth where there are considerable particularities related; and they always seem to bear some proportion to one another. Thus, there is a great want of the particulars of time, place, and persons, in Manetho's account of the Egyptian Dynasties, Ctesias's of the Assyrian Kings, and those which the technical chronologers have given of the ancient kingdoms of Greece: and agreeably thereto, the accounts have much fiction and falsehood, with some truth: whereas Thucydides's History of the Peloponnesian War, and Cæsar's of the War in Gaul, in both which particulars of time, place, and persons, are mentioned, are universally esteemed true to a great degree of exactness.’ Hartley, vol. ii. p. 109.

died.' It is not conceivable that a man should do this upon any idle report or frivolous account, or, indeed, without being fully satisfied and convinced of the truth and credibility of the narrative to which he trusted. But it did not stop at opinions. They who believed Christianity, acted upon it. Many made it the express business of their lives to publish the intelligence. It was required of those who admitted that intelligence, to change forthwith their conduct and their principles, to take up a different course of life, to part with their habits and gratifications, and begin a new set of rules, and system of behavior. The apostles, at least, were interested not to sacrifice their ease, their fortunes, and their lives, for an idle tale; multitudes besides them were induced, by the same tale, to encounter opposition, danger, and sufferings.

If it be said, that the mere promise of a future state would do all this; I answer, that the mere promise of a future state, without any evidence to give credit or assurance to it, would do nothing. A few wandering fishermen talking of a resurrection of the dead, could produce no effect. If it be farther said, that men easily believe what they anxiously desire; I again answer that, in my opinion, the very contrary of this is nearer to the truth. Anxiety of desire, earnestness of expectation, the vastness of an event, rather causes men to disbelieve, to doubt, to dread a fallacy, to distrust, and to examine. When our Lord's resurrection was first reported to the apostles, they did not believe, we are told, for joy. This was natural, and is agreeable to experience.

VII. We have laid out of the case those accounts which require no more than a simple assent; and we now also lay out of the case those which come merely *in affirmance* of opinions already formed. This last circumstance is of the utmost importance to notice well. It has long been observed, that Popish miracles happen in Popish countries; that they make no converts: which proves that stories are accepted, when they fall in with principles already fixed, with the public sentiments, or with the sentiments of a party already engaged on the side the miracle supports, which would not be attempted to be produced in the face of enemies, in opposition to reigning tenets or favorite prejudices, or when, if they be believed, the belief must draw men away from their preconceived and habitual opinions, from their modes of life and rules of action. In the former case, men may not only receive a miraculous account, but may both act and suffer on the side and in the cause, which the miracle supports, yet not act or suffer for the miracle, but in pursuance of a prior persuasion. The miracle, like any other argument which only confirms what was before believed, is admitted with little examination. In the moral, as in the natural world, it is *change* which requires a cause. Men are easily fortified in their old opinions, driven from them with great difficulty. Now how does this apply to the Christian history? The miracles, there recorded, were wrought in the midst of enemies, under a government, a priesthood, and a magistracy, decidedly and vehemently adverse to them, and to the pretensions which they supported. They were Protestant miracles in a

Popish country; they were Popish miracles in the midst of Protestants. They produced a change; they established a society upon the spot, adhering to the belief of them; they made converts; and those who were converted gave up to the testimony their most fixed opinions and most favorite prejudices. They who acted and suffered in the cause, acted and suffered *for* the miracles: for there was no anterior persuasion to induce them, no prior reverence, prejudice, or partiality, to take hold of. Jesus had not one follower when he set up his claim. His miracles gave birth to his sect. No part of this description belongs to the ordinary evidence of Heathen or Popish miracles. Even most of the miracles alleged to have been performed by Christians, in the second and third century of its era, want this confirmation. It constitutes indeed a line of partition between the *origin* and the *progress* of Christianity. Frauds and fallacies might mix themselves with the progress, which could not possibly take place in the commencement of the religion; at least, according to any laws of human conduct that we are acquainted with. What should suggest to the first propagators of Christianity, especially to fishermen, tax-gatherers, and husbandmen, such a thought as that of changing the religion of the world; what could bear them through the difficulties in which the attempt engaged them; what could procure any degree of success to the attempt; are questions which apply, with great force, to the setting out of the institution; with less, to every future stage of it.

To hear some men talk, one would suppose the setting up of a religion by miracles to be a thing of every day's experience; whereas the whole current of history is against it. Hath any founder of a new sect amongst Christians pretended to miraculous powers, and succeeded by his pretensions? 'Were these powers claimed or exercised by the founders of the sects of the Waldenses and Albigenses? Did Wickliffe in England pretend to it? Did Huss or Jerome in Bohemia? Did Luther in Germany, Zuinglius in Switzerland, Calvin in France, or any of the reformers, advance this plea?\*' The French prophets, in the beginning of the present century,† ventured to allege miraculous evidence, and immediately ruined their cause by their temerity. 'Concerning the religion of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, of China, a single miracle cannot be named, that was ever offered as a test of any of those religions *before* their establishment.†'

We may add to what has been observed of the distinction which we are considering, that, where miracles are alleged merely in affirmance of a prior opinion, they who believe the doctrine may sometimes propagate a belief of the miracles which they do not themselves entertain. This is the case of what are called *pious* frauds; but it is a case, I apprehend, which takes place solely in support of a persuasion already established. At least it does not

\* Campbell on Miracles, p. 120. ed. 1766.

† Adams on Mir. p. 75.

† The eighteenth.



hold of the apostolical history. If the apostles did not believe the miracles, they did not believe the religion; and, without this belief, where was the *piety*, what place was there for any thing which could bear the name or color of piety, in publishing and attesting miracles in its behalf? If it be said that any promote the belief of revelation, and of any accounts which favor that belief, because they think them, whether well or ill founded, of public and political utility; I answer, that if a character exist, which can with less justice than another be ascribed to the founders of the Christian religion; it is that of politicians, or of men capable of entertaining political views. The truth is, that there is no assignable character which will account for the conduct of the apostles, supposing their story to be false. If bad men, what could have induced them to take such pains to promote virtue? If good men, they would not have gone about the country with a string of lies in their mouths.

IN APPRECIATING the credit of any miraculous story, these are distinctions which relate to the evidence. There are other distinctions, of great moment in the question, which relate to the miracles themselves. Of which latter kind the following ought carefully to be retained.

I. It is not necessary to admit as a miracle, what can be resolved into a *false perception*. Of this nature was the demon of Socrates; the visions of Saint Anthony and of many others; the vision which Lord Herbert of Cherbury describes himself to have seen; Colonel Gardiner's vision, as related in his life, written by Dr. Doddridge. All these may be accounted for by a momentary insanity; for the characteristic symptom of human madness is the rising up in the mind of images not distinguishable by the patient from impressions upon the senses.\* The cases, however, in which the possibility of this delusion exists, are divided from the cases in which it does not exist, by many, and those not obscure marks. They are, for the most part, cases of visions or voices. The object is hardly ever touched. The vision submits not to be handled. One sense does not confirm another. They are likewise almost always cases of a *solitary* witness. It is in the highest degree improbable, and I know not, indeed, whether it hath ever been the fact, that the same derangement of the mental organs should seize different persons at the same time; a derangement, I mean, so much the same, as to represent to their imagination the same objects. Lastly, these are always cases of *momentary* miracles; by which term I mean to denote miracles, of which the whole existence is of short duration, in contradistinction to miracles which are attended with permanent effects. The appearance of a spectre, the hearing of a supernatural sound, is a momentary miracle. The sensible proof is gone, when the apparition or sound is over. But if a person born blind be restored to sight, a notorious cripple to the use of his limbs, or a dead man to life, here is a permanent effect produced by supernatural means. The change indeed was instantaneous, but the proof continues. The subject of

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\* Batty on Lunacy.

the miracle remains. The man cured or restored is there: his former condition was known, and his present condition may be examined. This can by no possibility be resolved into false perception; and of this kind are by far the greater part of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he did not merely move, and speak, and die again; or come out of the grave, and vanish away. He returned to his home and family, and there continued; for we find him, some time afterward, in the same town, sitting at table with Jesus and his sisters; visited by great multitudes of the Jews, as a subject of curiosity; giving by his presence so much uneasiness to the Jewish rulers as to beget in them a design of destroying him.\* No delusion can account for this. The French prophets in England, some time since, gave out that one of their teachers would come to life again; but their enthusiasm never made them believe that they actually saw him alive. The blind man, whose restoration to sight at Jerusalem is recorded in the ninth chapter of St. John's Gospel, did not quit the place or conceal himself from inquiry. On the contrary, he was forthcoming, to answer the call, to satisfy the scrutiny, and to sustain the brow-beating of Christ's angry and powerful enemies. When the cripple at the gate of the temple was suddenly cured by Peter,† he did not immediately relapse into his former lameness, or disappear out of the city; but boldly and honestly produced himself along with the apostles, when they were brought the next day before the Jewish council.‡ Here, though the miracle was sudden, the proof was permanent. The lameness had been notorious, the cure continued. This, therefore, could not be the effect of any momentary delirium, either in the subject or in the witnesses of the transactions. It is the same with the greatest number of the Scripture miracles. There are other cases of a *mixed* nature, in which, although the principal miracle be momentary, some circumstance combined with it is permanent. Of this kind is the history of St. Paul's conversion.§ The sudden light and sound, the vision and the voice, upon the road to Damascus, were momentary: but Paul's blindness for three days in consequence of what had happened; the communication made to Ananias in another place, and by a vision independent of the former; Ananias finding out Paul in consequence of intelligence so received, and finding him in the condition described, and Paul's recovery of his sight upon Ananias's laying his hands upon him; are circumstances, which take the transaction, and the principal miracle as included in it, entirely out of the case of momentary miracles, or of such as may be accounted for by false perceptions. Exactly the same thing may be observed of Peter's vision preparatory to the call of Cornelius, and of its connexion with what was imparted in a distant place to Cornelius himself, and with the message dispatched by Cornelius to Peter. The vision might be a dream; the message could not. Either commu-

\* John xii. 1, 2, 9, 10.

† Acts iii. 2.

‡ Ib. iv. 14.

§ Ib. ix.

nication, taken separately, might be a delusion; the concurrence of the two was impossible to happen without a supernatural cause.

Beside the risk of delusion which attaches upon momentary miracles, there is also much more room for *imposture*. The account cannot be examined at the moment; and, when that is also a moment of hurry and confusion, it may not be difficult for men of influence to gain credit to any story which they may wish to have believed. This is precisely the case of one of the best attested of the miracles of Old Rome, the appearance of Castor and Pollux in the battle fought by Posthumius with the Latins at the lake Regillus. There is no doubt but that Posthumius, after the battle, spread the report of such an appearance. No person could deny it whilst it was said to last. No person, perhaps, had any inclination to dispute it afterward; or, if they had, could say with positiveness, what was or what was not seen, by some or other of the army, in the dismay and amidst the tumult of a battle.

In assigning false perceptions as the origin to which some miraculous accounts may be referred, I have not mentioned claims to inspiration, illuminations, secret notices or directions, internal sensations, or consciousness of being acted upon by spiritual influences, good or bad; because these, appealing to no external proof, however convincing they may be to the persons themselves, form no part of what can be accounted miraculous evidence. Their own credibility stands upon their alliance with other miracles. The discussion, therefore, of all such pretensions may be omitted.

II. It is not necessary to bring into the comparison what may be called *tentative* miracles; that is, where, out of a great number of trials, some succeeded; and in the accounts of which, although the narrative of the successful cases be alone preserved, and that of the unsuccessful cases sunk, yet enough is stated to show that the cases produced are only a few out of many in which the same means have been employed. This observation bears, with considerable force, upon the ancient oracles and auguries, in which a single coincidence of the event with the prediction is talked of and magnified, whilst failures are forgotten, or suppressed, or accounted for. It is also applicable to the cures wrought by relics, and at the tombs of saints. The boasted efficacy of the king's touch, upon which Mr. Hume lays some stress, falls under the same description. Nothing is alleged concerning it, which is not alleged of various nostrums, namely, out of many thousands who have used them, certified proofs of a few who have recovered after them. No solution of this sort is applicable to the miracles of the Gospel. There is nothing in the narrative, which can induce, or even allow, us to believe, that Christ attempted cures in many instances, and succeeded in a few; or that he ever made the attempt in vain. He did not profess to heal everywhere all that were sick; on the contrary, he told the Jews, evidently meaning to represent his own case, that, 'although many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land, yet unto none of them was Elias sent, save

unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow: and that 'many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed save Naaman the Syrian.\* By which examples he gave them to understand, that it was not the nature of a divine interposition, or necessary to its purpose, to be general; still less to answer every challenge that might be made, which would teach men to put their faith upon these experiments. Christ never pronounced the word, but the effect followed.† It was not a thousand sick that received his benediction, and a few that were benefited; a single paralytic is let down in his bed at Jesus's feet, in the midst of a surrounding multitude; Jesus bid him walk, and he did so.‡ A man with a withered hand is in the synagogue; Jesus bid him stretch forth his hand, in the presence of the assembly, and it was restored 'whole like the other.§ There was nothing tentative in these cures; nothing that can be explained by the power of accident.

We may observe also, that many of the cures which Christ wrought, such as that of a person blind from his birth, also many miracles beside, as raising the dead, walking upon the sea, feeding a great multitude with a few loaves and fishes, are of a nature which does not in anywise admit of the supposition of a fortunate experiment.

III. We may dismiss from the question all accounts in which, allowing the phenomenon to be real, the fact to be true, it still remains *doubtful* whether a miracle were wrought. This is the case with the ancient history of what is called the thundering legion, of the extraordinary circumstances which obstructed the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem by Julian, the circling of the flames and fragrant smell at the martyrdom of Polycarp, the sudden shower that extinguished the fire into which the Scriptures were thrown in the Diocletian persecution; Constantine's dream; his inscribing in consequence of it the cross upon his standard and the shields of his soldiers; his victory, and the escape of the standard-bearer; perhaps also the imagined appearance of the cross in the heavens, though this last circumstance is very deficient in historical evidence. It is also the case with the modern annual exhibition of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples. It is a doubt likewise, which ought to be excluded by very special circumstances, from these narratives which relate to the supernatural cure of hypo-

\* Luke iv. 25.

† One, and only one, instance may be produced in which the *disciples* of Christ do seem to have attempted a cure, and not to have been able to perform it. The story is very ingenuously related by three of the evangelists.‖ The patient was afterward healed by Christ himself; and the whole transaction seems to have been intended, as it was well suited, to display the superiority of Christ above all who performed miracles in his name, a distinction which, during his presence in the world, it might be necessary to inculcate by some such proof as this.

‡ Mark ii. 3.

§ Matt. xii. 10.

‖ Matt. xvii. 14. Mark ix. 14. Luke ix. 33.

chondriacal and nervous complaints, and of all diseases which are much affected by the imagination. The miracles of the second and third century are, usually, healing the sick, and casting out evil spirits, miracles in which there is room for some error and deception. We hear nothing of causing the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the lepers to be cleansed.\* There are also instances in Christian writers, of reputed miracles, which were natural operations, though not known to be such at the time; as that of articulate speech after the loss of a great part of the tongue.

IV. To the same head of objection nearly, may also be referred accounts, in which the variation of a small circumstance may have transformed some extraordinary appearance; or some critical coincidence of events, into a miracle; stories, in a word, which may be resolved into exaggeration. The miracles of the Gospel can by no possibility be explained away in this manner. Total fiction will account for any thing; but no stretch of exaggeration that has any parallel in other histories, no force of fancy upon real circumstances, could produce the narratives which we now have. The feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes surpasses all bounds of exaggeration. The raising of Lazarus, of the widow's son at Nain, as well as many of the cures which Christ wrought, come not within the compass of misrepresentation. I mean, that it is impossible to assign any position of circumstances however peculiar, any accidental effects however extraordinary, any natural singularity, which could supply an origin or foundation to these accounts.

Having thus enumerated several exceptions, which may justly be taken to relations of miracles, it is necessary when we read the Scriptures, to bear in our minds this general remark; that, although there be miracles recorded in the New Testament, which fall within some or other of the exceptions here assigned, yet that they are united with others, to which none of the same exceptions extend, and that their credibility stands upon this union. Thus the visions and revelations which Saint Paul asserts to have been imparted to him, may not, in their separate evidence, be distinguishable from the visions and revelations which many others have alleged. But here is the difference. Saint Paul's pretensions were attested by external miracles wrought by himself, and by miracles wrought in the cause to which these visions relate; or, to speak more properly, the same historical authority which informs us of one, informs us of the other. This is not ordinarily true of the visions of enthusiasts, or even of the accounts in which they are contained. Again, some of Christ's own miracles were *momentary*; as the transfiguration, the appearance and voice from Heaven at his baptism, a voice from the clouds on one occasion afterward, (John xii. 28.) and some others. It is not denied, that the distinction which we have proposed concerning miracles of this species, applies,

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\* Jortin's Remarks, vol. ii. p. 51.

in diminution of the force of the evidence, as much to these instances as to others. But this is the case, not with all the miracles ascribed to Christ, nor with the greatest part, nor with many. Whatever force therefore there may be in the objection, we have numerous miracles which are free from it; and even these to which it is applicable, are little affected by it in their credit, because there are few who, admitting the rest, will reject *them*. If there be miracles of the New Testament, which come within any of the *other* heads into which we have distributed the objections, the same remark must be repeated. And this is one way, in which the unexampled number and variety of the miracles ascribed to Christ strengthens the credibility of Christianity. For it precludes any solution, or conjecture about a solution, which imagination, or even which experience, might suggest concerning some particular miracles, if considered independently of others. The miracles of Christ were of various kinds,\* and performed in great varieties of situation, form, and manner; at Jerusalem, the metropolis of the Jewish nation and religion; in different parts of Judea and Galilee; in cities and villages; in synagogues; in private houses; in the street, in highways; with preparation, as in the case of Lazarus; by accident, as in the case of the widow's son of Nain; when attended by multitudes, and when alone with the patient; in the midst of his disciples, and in the presence of his enemies; with the common people around him, and before Scribes and Pharisees, and rulers of the synagogues.

I apprehend that, when we remove from the comparison, the cases which are fairly disposed of by the observations that have been stated, many cases will not remain. To those which do remain, we apply this final distinction; 'that there is not satisfactory evidence, that persons, pretending to be original witnesses of the miracles, passed their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undertaken and undergone in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in consequence of their belief of the truth of those accounts.'

## CHAP. II.

BUT they, with whom we argue, have undoubtedly a right to select their own examples. The instances with which Mr. Hume has chosen to confront the miracles of the New Testament, and

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\* Not only healing every species of disease, but turning water into wine (John ii.); feeding multitudes with a few loaves and fishes (Matt. xiv. 15; Mark vi. 35; Luke ix. 12; John vi. 5.); walking on the sea (Matt. xiv. 25.); calming a storm (Matt. viii. 25; Luke viii. 24.); a celestial voice at his baptism, and miraculous appearance (Matt. iii. 16; afterward John xii. 28.); his transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 1—8; Mark ix. 2; Luke ix. 28; 2 Peter i. 16, 17.); raising the dead in three distinct instances (Matt. ix. 18; Mark v. 22; Luke viii. 41; Luke vii. 14; John xi.)

which, therefore, we are entitled to regard as the strongest which the history of the world could supply to the inquiries of a very acute and learned adversary, are the three following:

I. The cure of a blind and of a lame man of Alexandria, by the emperor Vespasian, as related by Tacitus;

II. The restoration of the limb of an attendant in a Spanish church, as told by cardinal de Retz; and,

III. The cures said to be performed at the tomb of the abbé Paris, in the early part of the present century.

I. The narrative of Tacitus is delivered in these terms: 'One of the common people of Alexandria, known to be diseased in his eyes, by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that superstitious nation worship above all other gods, prostrated himself before the emperor, earnestly imploring from him a remedy for his blindness, and entreating that he would deign to anoint with his spittle his cheeks and the balls of his eyes. Another, diseased in his hand, requested, by the admonition of the same god, that he might be touched by the foot of the emperor. Vespasian at first derided and despised their application; afterward, when they continued to urge their petitions, he sometimes appeared to dread the imputation of vanity; at other times, by the earnest supplication of the patients, and the persuasion of his flatterers, to be induced to hope for success. At length he commanded an inquiry to be made by the physicians, whether such a blindness and debility were vincible by human aid. The report of the physicians contained various points; that in the one the power of vision was not destroyed, but would return if the obstacles were removed; that in the other, the diseased joints might be restored, if a healing power were applied; that it was, perhaps, agreeable to the gods to do this; that the emperor was elected by divine assistance; lastly, that the credit of the success would be the emperor's, the ridicule of the disappointment would fall upon the patients. Vespasian, believing that every thing was in the power of his fortune, and that nothing was any longer incredible, whilst the multitude, which stood by, eagerly expected the event, with a countenance expressive of joy, executed what he was desired to do. Immediately the hand was restored to its use, and light returned to the blind man. They who were present relate both these cures, even at this time, when there is nothing to be gained by lying.\*

Now, though Tacitus wrote this account twenty-seven years after the miracle is said to have been performed, and wrote at Rome of what passed at Alexandria, and wrote also from report: and although it does not appear that he had examined the story, or that he believed it (but rather the contrary), yet I think his testimony sufficient to prove that such a transaction took place: by which I mean, that the two men in question did apply to Vespasian; that Vespasian did touch the diseased in the manner related; and that a cure was re-

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\* Tacit. Hist. lib. iv.

ported to have followed the operation. But the affair labors under a strong and just suspicion, that the whole of it was a concerted imposture brought about by collusion between the patients, the physician, and the emperor. This solution is probable, because there was every thing to suggest, and every thing to facilitate such a scheme. The miracle was calculated to confer honor upon the emperor, and upon the god Serapis. It was achieved in the midst of the emperor's flatterers and followers; in a city, and amongst a populace, beforehand devoted to his interest, and to the worship of the god; where it would have been treason and blasphemy together, to have contradicted the fame of the cure, or even to have questioned it. And what is very observable in the account is, that the report of the physicians is just such a report as would have been made of a case, in which no external marks of the disease existed, and which, consequently, was capable of being easily counterfeited, viz. that in the first of the patients the organs of vision were not destroyed, that the weakness of the second was in his joints. The strongest circumstance in Tacitus's narration is, that the first patient was '*notus tabe oculorum*,' remarked or notorious for the disease in his eyes. But this was a circumstance which might have found its way into the story in its progress from a distant country, and during an interval of thirty years; or it might be true that the malady of the eyes was notorious, yet that the nature and degree of the disease had never been ascertained; a case by no means uncommon. The emperor's reserve was easily affected; or it is possible he might not be in the secret. There does not seem to be much weight in the observation of Tacitus, that they who were present, continued even then to relate the story when there was nothing to be gained by the lie. It only proves that those who had told the story for many years persisted in it. The state of mind of the witnesses and spectators *at the time*, is the point to be attended to. Still less is there of pertinency in Mr. Hume's eulogium on the cautious and penetrating genius of the historian; for it does not appear that the historian believed it. The terms in which he speaks of Serapis, the deity to whose interposition the miracle was attributed, scarcely suffer us to suppose that Tacitus thought the miracle to be real: 'by the admonition of the god Serapis, whom that superstitious nation (*dedita superstitionibus gens*) worship above all other gods.' To have brought this supposed miracle within the limits of comparison with the miracles of Christ, it ought to have appeared, that a person of a low and private station, in the midst of enemies, with the whole power of the country opposing him, with every one around him prejudiced or interested against his claims and character, pretended to perform these cures, and required the spectators, upon the strength of what they saw, to give up their firmest hopes and opinions, and follow *him* through a life of trial and danger; that many were so moved, as to obey his call, at the expense both of every notion in which they had been brought up, and of their ease, safety, and reputation; and that by these beginnings, a change was produced in the world, the effects of which remain to this day: a case, both



in its circumstances and consequences, very unlike any thing we find in Tacitus's relation.

II. The story taken from the Memoirs of Cardinal de Retz, which is the second example alleged by Mr. Hume, is this: 'In the church of Saragossa in Spain, the canons showed me a man whose business it was to light the lamps; telling me, that he had been several years at the gate with one leg only. I saw him with two.\*

It is stated by Mr. Hume, that the cardinal, who relates this story, did not believe it: and it nowhere appears, that he either examined the limb, or asked the patient, or indeed any one, a single question about the matter. An artificial leg, wrought with art, would be sufficient, in a place where no such contrivance had ever before been heard of, to give origin and currency to the report. The ecclesiastics of the place would, it is probable, favor the story, inasmuch as it advanced the honor of their image and church. And if *they* patronized it, no other person at Saragossa, in the middle of the last century, would care to dispute it. The story likewise coincided, not less with the wishes and preconceptions of the people, than with the interests of their ecclesiastical rulers: so that there was prejudice backed by authority, and both operating upon extreme ignorance, to account for the success of the imposture. If, as I have suggested, the contrivance of an artificial limb was then new, it would not occur to the cardinal himself to suspect it; especially under the carelessness of mind with which he heard the tale, and the little inclination he felt to scrutinize or expose its fallacy.

III. The miracles related to have been wrought at the tomb of the abbé Paris, admit in general of this solution. The patients who frequented the tomb were so affected by their devotion, their expectation, the place, the solemnity, and, above all, by the sympathy of the surrounding multitude, that many of them were thrown into violent convulsions, which convulsions, in certain instances, produced a removal of disorders depending upon obstructions. We shall, at this day, have the less difficulty in admitting the above account, because it is the very same thing as hath lately been experienced in the operations of animal magnetism; and the report of the French physicians upon that mysterious remedy is very applicable to the present consideration, *viz.* that the pretenders to the art, by working upon the imaginations of their patients, were frequently able to produce convulsions; that convulsions so produced, are amongst the most powerful, but, at the same time, most uncertain and unmanageable applications to the human frame which can be employed.

Circumstances, which indicate this explication in the case of the Parisian miracles, are the following:

1. They were *tentative*. Out of many thousand sick, infirm, and diseased persons, who resorted to the tomb, the professed history of the miracles contains only nine cures.

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\* Liv. iv. A. D. 1654.

2. The convulsions at the tomb are admitted.
3. The diseases were, for the most part, of that sort which depends upon inaction and obstruction, as dropsies, palsies, and some tumors.
4. The cures were gradual; some patients attending many days, some several weeks, and some several months.
5. The cures were many of them incomplete.
6. Others were temporary.\*

So that all the wonder we are called upon to account for, is, that, out of an almost innumerable multitude which resorted to the tomb for the cure of their complaints, and many of whom were there agitated by strong convulsions, a very small proportion experienced a beneficial change in their constitution, especially in the action of the nerves and glands.

Some of the cases alleged, do not require that we should have recourse to this solution. The first case in the catalogue is scarcely distinguishable from the progress of a natural recovery. It was that of a young man, who labored under an inflammation of one eye, and had lost the sight of the other. The inflamed eye was relieved, but the blindness of the other remained. The inflammation had before been abated by medicine; and the young man, at the time of his attendance at the tomb, was using a lotion of laudanum. And, what is a still more material part of the case, the inflammation after some interval returned. Another case was that of a young man who had lost his sight by the puncture of an awl, and the discharge of the aqueous humor through the wound. The sight, which had been gradually returning, was much improved during his visit to the tomb, that is, probably, in the same degree in which the discharged humor was replaced by fresh secretions. And it is observable, that these two are the only cases which, from their nature, should seem unlikely to be affected by convulsions.

In one material respect I allow that the Parisian miracles were different from those related by Tacitus, and from the Spanish miracle of the cardinal de Retz. They had not, like them, all the power and all the prejudice of the country on their side to begin with. They were alleged by one party against another, by the Jansenists against the Jesuits. These were of course opposed and examined by their adversaries. The consequence of which examination was, that many falsehoods were detected, that with something really extraordinary much fraud appeared to be mixed. And if some of the cases upon which designed misrepresentation could not be charged, were not at the time satisfactorily accounted for, it was because the efficacy of strong spasmodic affections was not then sufficiently known. Finally, the cause of Jansenism did not rise by the miracles, but sunk, although the miracles had the anterior persuasion of all the numerous adherents of that cause to set out with.

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\* The reader will find these particulars verified in the detail, by the accurate inquiries of the present bishop of Sarum, in his *Criterion of Miracles*, p. 132, &c.

These, let us remember, are the strongest examples, which the history of ages supplies. In none of them was the miracle *unequivocal*; by none of them, were established prejudices and persuasions overthrown; of none of them, did the credit make its way, in opposition to authority and power; by none of them, were many induced to commit themselves, and that in contradiction to prior opinions, to a life of mortification, danger, and sufferings; none were called upon to attest them, at the expense of their fortunes and safety.\*

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\* It may be thought that the historian of the Parisian miracles, M. Montgeron, forms an exception to this last assertion. He presented his book (with a suspicion, as it should seem, of the danger of what he was doing) to the king; and was shortly afterward committed to prison, from which he never came out. Had the miracles been unequivocal, and had M. Montgeron been originally convinced by them, I should have allowed this exception. It would have stood, I think, alone, in the argument of our adversaries. But, beside what has been observed of the dubious nature of the miracles, the account which M. Montgeron has himself left of his conversion, shows both the state of his mind, and that *his persuasion was not built upon external miracles*.—'Scarcely had he entered the churchyard, when he was struck (he tells us) with awe and reverence, having never before heard prayers pronounced with so much ardor and transport as he observed amongst the supplicants at the tomb. Upon this, throwing himself on his knees, resting his elbows on the tomb-stone, and covering his face with his hands, he spake the following prayer:—*O thou by whose intercession so many miracles are said to be performed, if it be true that a part of thee surviveth the grave, and that thou hast influence with the Almighty, have pity on the darkness of my understanding, and through his mercy obtain the removal of it.*' Having thus prayed, 'many thoughts (as he saith) began to open themselves to his mind; and so profound was his attention, that he continued on his knees four hours, not in the least disturbed by the vast crowd of surrounding supplicants. During this time, all the arguments which he ever heard or read in favor of Christianity, occurred to him with so much force, and seemed so strong and convincing, that he went home fully satisfied of the truth of religion in general, and of the holiness and power of that person, who (as he supposed) had engaged the Divine Goodness to enlighten his understanding so suddenly.' Douglas's Crit. of Mir. p. 214.

## PART II.

### OF THE AUXILIARY EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

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#### CHAP. I.

##### *Prophecy.*

ISAIAH lii. 13. liii. 'Behold, my Servant shall deal prudently; he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many as were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men); so shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them, shall they see; and that which they had not heard, shall they consider.—Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people, was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.'

These words are extant in a book, purporting to contain the predictions of a writer who lived seven centuries before the Christian era.

That material part of every argument from prophecy, namely, that the words alleged were actually spoken or written before the fact to which they are applied took place, or could by any natural means be foreseen, is, in the present instance, incontestable. The record comes out of the custody of adversaries. The Jews, as an ancient father well observed, are our librarians. The passage is in their copies, as well as in ours. With many attempts to explain it away, none has ever been made by them to discredit its authenticity.

And, what adds to the force of the quotation is, that it is taken from a writing *declaredly prophetic*; a writing, professing to describe such future transactions and changes in the world, as were connected with the fate and interests of the Jewish nation. It is not a passage in an historical or devotional composition, which, because it turns out to be applicable to some future events, or to some future situation of affairs, is presumed to have been oracular. The words of Isaiah were delivered by him in a prophetic character, with the solemnity belonging to that character: and what he so delivered, was all along understood by the Jewish reader to refer to something that was to take place after the time of the author. The public sentiments of the Jews concerning the design of Isaiah's writings, are set forth in the book of Ecclesiasticus:\* 'He saw by an excellent spirit, what should come to pass at the last, and he comforted them that mourned in Sion. He showed what should come to pass for ever, and secret things or ever they came.'

It is also an advantage which this prophecy possesses, that it is intermixed with no other subject. It is entire, separate, and uninterruptedly directed to one scene of things.

The *application* of the prophecy to the evangelic history is plain and appropriate. Here is no double sense; no figurative language, but what is sufficiently intelligible to every reader of every country. The obscurities (by which I mean the expressions that require a knowledge of local diction, and of local allusion) are few, and not of great importance. Nor have I found that varieties of reading, or a different construing of the original, produce any material alteration in the sense of the prophecy. Compare the common translation with that of bishop Lowth, and the difference is not considerable. So far as they do differ, bishop Lowth's corrections, which are the faithful result of an accurate examination, bring the description nearer to the New Testament history than it was before. In the fourth verse of the fifty-third chapter, what our Bible renders 'stricken,' he translates 'judicially stricken:' and in the eighth verse, the clause, 'he was taken from prison and from judgment,' the bishop gives, 'by an oppressive judgment he was taken off.' The next words to these, 'who shall declare his generation?' are much cleared up in their meaning by the bishop's version; 'his

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\* Chap. xlviii. ver. 24.

manner of life who would declare? i. e. who would stand forth in his defence? The former part of the ninth verse, 'and he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,' which inverts the circumstances of Christ's passion, the bishop brings out in an order perfectly agreeable to the event; 'and his grave was appointed with the wicked, but with the rich man was his tomb.' The words in the eleventh verse, 'by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many,' are, in the bishop's version, 'by the *knowledge of him* shall my righteous servant justify many.'

It is natural to inquire what turn the Jews themselves give to this prophecy.\* There is good proof that the ancient Rabbins explained it of their expected Messiah;† but their modern expositors concur, I think, in representing it as a description of the calamitous state and intended restoration of the Jewish people, who are here, as they say, exhibited under the character of a single person. I have not discovered that their exposition rests upon any critical arguments, or upon these in any other than a very minute degree. The clause in the ninth verse, which we render 'for the transgression of my people was he stricken,' and in the margin, 'was the stroke upon him,' the Jews read, 'for the transgression of my people was the stroke upon *them*.' And what they allege in support of the alteration amounts only to this, that the Hebrew pronoun is capable of a plural as well as of a singular signification; that is to say, is capable of their construction as well as ours.‡ And this is all the

\* 'Vaticinium hoc Esaiæ est carnificina Rabbiorum, de quo aliqui Judæi mihi confessi sunt, Rabbinos suos ex propheticiis scripturis faciliè se extricare potuisse, *modò Esias tacuisset.*' Hulse, Theol. Jud. p. 318, quoted by Poole, in loc.

† Hulse, Theol. Jud. 430.

‡ Bishop Lowth adopts in this place the reading of the Seventy, which gives smitten *to death*, 'for the transgression of my people was he smitten to death.' The addition of the words 'to death,' makes an end of the Jewish interpretation of the clause. And the authority upon which this reading (though not given by the present Hebrew text) is adopted, Dr. Kennicot has set forth by an argument not only so cogent, but so clear and popular, that I beg leave to transcribe the substance of it into this note:—Origen, after having quoted at large this prophecy concerning the Messiah, tells us, that, having once made use of this passage, in a dispute against some that were accounted wise among the Jews, one of them replied that the words did not mean one man, but one people, the Jews, who were smitten of God, and dispersed among the Gentiles for their conversion; that he then urged many parts of this prophecy, to show the absurdity of this interpretation, and that he seemed to press them the hardest by this sentence,—"for the transgression of my people was he smitten to death." Now, as Origen, the author of the Hexapla, must have understood Hebrew, we cannot suppose that he would have urged this last text as so decisive, if the Greek version had not agreed here with the Hebrew text; nor that these wise Jews would have been at all distressed by this quotation, unless the Hebrew text had read agreeably to the words "to death," on which the argument principally depended; for, by quoting it immediately, they would have triumphed over him, and reprobated his Greek version. This, whenever they could

variation contended for; the rest of the prophecy they read as we do. The probability, therefore, of their exposition, is a subject of which we are as capable of judging as themselves. This judgment is open indeed to the good sense of every attentive reader. The application which the Jews contend for, appears to me to labor under insuperable difficulties; in particular, it may be demanded of them to explain, in *whose* name or person, if the Jewish people be the sufferer, does the prophet speak when he says, 'He hath borne *our* griefs, and carried *our* sorrows, yet *we* did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted; but he was wounded for *our* transgressions, he was bruised for *our* iniquities, the chastisement of *our* peace was upon him, and with his stripes *we* are healed.' Again, the description in the seventh verse, 'he was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth,' quadrates with no part of the Jewish history with which we are acquainted. The mention of the 'grave,' and the 'tomb,' in the ninth verse, is not very applicable to the fortunes of a nation; and still less so is the conclusion of the prophecy in the twelfth verse, which expressly represents the sufferings as *voluntary*, and the sufferer as interceding for the offenders; 'because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.'

There are other prophecies of the Old Testament, interpreted by Christians to relate to the Gospel history, which are deserving both of great regard, and of a very attentive consideration: but I content myself with stating the above, as well because I think it the clearest and the strongest of all, as because most of the rest, in order that their value might be represented with any tolerable degree of fidelity, require a discussion unsuitable to the limits and nature of this work. The reader will find them disposed in order, and distinctly explained, in bishop Chandler's treatise on the subject: and he will bear in mind, what has been often, and, I think, truly, urged by the advocates of Christianity, that there is no other eminent person, to the history of whose life so many circumstances can be made to apply. They who object that much has been done by the power of chance, the ingenuity of accommodation, and the industry of research, ought to try whether the same, or any thing

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do it, was their constant practice in their disputes with the Christians. Origen himself, who laboriously compared the Hebrew text with the Septuagint, has recorded the necessity of arguing with the Jews, from such passages only as were in the Septuagint agreeable to the Hebrew. Wherefore, as Origen had carefully compared the Greek version of the Septuagint with the Hebrew text; and as he puzzled and confounded the learned Jews, by urging upon them the reading "to death," in this place; it seems almost impossible not to conclude, both from Origen's argument, and the silence of his Jewish adversaries, that the Hebrew text at that time actually had the word agreeably to the version of the Seventy.' Lowth's Isaiah, p. 242.

like it, could be done, if Mahomet, or any other person, were proposed as the subject of Jewish prophecy.

II. A second head of argument from prophecy, is founded upon our Lord's predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, recorded by three out of the four evangelists.

Luke xxi. 5—25. 'And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass? And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived, for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye therefore not after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by-and-by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and pestilences; and fearful sights, and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before, what ye shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out: and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days: for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.'

In terms nearly similar, this discourse is related in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, and the thirteenth of Mark. The prospect of the same evils drew from our Saviour, on another occasion, the following affecting expressions of concern, which are preserved by Saint Luke (xix. 41—44.): 'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee,



and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.'—These passages are direct and explicit predictions. References to the same event, some plain, some parabolical, or otherwise figurative, are found in divers other discourses of our Lord.\*

The general agreement of the description with the event, viz. with the ruin of the Jewish nation, and the capture of Jerusalem under Vespasian, thirty-six years after Christ's death, is most evident; and the accordancy in various articles of detail and circumstances has been shown by many learned writers. It is also an advantage to the inquiry, and to the argument built upon it, that we have received a copious account of the transaction from Josephus, a Jewish and contemporary historian. This part of the case is perfectly free from doubt. The only question which, in my opinion, can be raised upon the subject, is whether the prophecy was really delivered *before* the event; I shall apply, therefore, my observations to this point solely.

1. The judgment of antiquity, though varying in the precise year of the publication of the three Gospels, *concurs* in assigning them a date prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.†

2. This judgment is confirmed by a strong probability arising from the course of human life. The destruction of Jerusalem took place in the seventieth year after the birth of Christ. The three evangelists, one of whom was his immediate companion, and the other two associated with his companions, were, it is probable, not much younger than he was. They must, consequently, have been far advanced in life when Jerusalem was taken; and no reason has been given why they should defer writing their histories so long.

3. ‡ If the evangelists, at the time of writing the Gospels, had known of the destruction of Jerusalem, by which catastrophe the prophecies were plainly fulfilled, it is most probable, that, in recording the predictions, they would have dropped some word or other about the completion; in like manner as Luke, after relating the denunciation of a dearth by Agabus, adds, 'which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar:§' whereas the prophecies are given distinctly in one chapter of each of the first three Gospels, and referred to in several different passages of each, and, in none of all these places, does there appear the smallest intimation that the things spoken of had come to pass. I do admit, that it would have been the part of an impostor, who wished his readers to believe that his book was written before the event, when in truth it was written after it, to have suppressed any such intimation carefully. But this was not the character of the authors of the Gospel. Cun-

\* Matt. xxi. 33—46. xii. 1—7. Mark xii. 1—12. Luke xiii. 1—9, xx. 9—20. xxi. 5—13.

† Lardner, vol. xiii.

‡ Le Clerc, Diss. 111. de Quat. Evang. num. vii. p. 541.

§ Acts xi. 28.

ning was no quality of theirs. Of all writers in the world, they thought the least of providing against objections. Moreover, there is no clause in any one of them, that makes a profession of their having written prior to the Jewish wars, which a fraudulent purpose would have led them to pretend. They have done neither one thing nor the other: they have neither inserted any words which might signify to the reader that their accounts were written *before* the destruction of Jerusalem, which a sophist would have done; nor have they dropped a hint of the completion of the prophecies recorded by them, which an *undesigning* writer, writing *after* the event, could hardly, on some or other of the many occasions that presented themselves, have missed of doing.

4. The admonitions\* which Christ is represented to have given to his followers to save themselves by flight, are not easily accounted for, on the supposition of the prophecy being fabricated after the event. Either the Christians, when the siege approached, did make their escape from Jerusalem, or they did not: if they did, they must have had the prophecy amongst them: if they did not know of any such prediction at the time of the siege, if they did not take notice of any such warning, it was an improbable fiction, in a writer publishing his work near to that time (which, on any, even the lowest and most disadvantageous supposition, was the case with the Gospels now in our hands), and addressing his works to Jews and to Jewish converts (which Matthew certainly did), to state that the followers of Christ had received admonition, of which they made no use when the occasion arrived, and of which experience then recent proved, that those, who were most concerned to know and regard them, were ignorant or negligent. Even if the prophecies came to the hands of the evangelists through no better vehicle than tradition, it must have been by a tradition which subsisted prior to the event. And to suppose that, without any authority whatever, without so much as even any tradition to guide them, they had forged these passages, is to impute to them a degree of fraud and imposture, from every appearance of which their compositions are as far removed as possible.

5. I think that, if the prophecies had been composed after the event, there would have been more specification. The names or descriptions of the enemy, the general, the emperor, would have been found in them. The designation of the time would have been more determinate. And I am fortified in this opinion by observing, that the counterfeited prophecies of the Sibylline oracles, of the twelve patriarchs, and I am inclined to believe, most others of the

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\* 'When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh; then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; then let them which are in the midst of it depart out, and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.' Luke xxi. 20, 21.

'When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then let them which be in Judea flee unto the mountains; let him which is on the house-top not come down to take any thing out of his house; neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.' Matt. xiv. 18.

kind, are mere transcripts of the history, moulded into a prophetic form.

It is objected, that the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is mixed, or connected, with expressions which relate to the final judgment of the world; and so connected, as to lead an ordinary reader to expect, that these two events would not be far distant from each other. To which I answer, that the objection does not concern our present argument. If our Saviour actually foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, it is sufficient; even although we should allow, that the narration of the prophecy had combined what had been said by him on kindred subjects, without accurately preserving the order, or always noticing the transition of the discourse.

## CHAP. II.

### *The Morality of the Gospel.*

IN stating the morality of the Gospel as an argument of its truth, I am willing to admit two points; first, that the teaching of morality was not the primary design of the mission; secondly, that morality, neither in the Gospel, nor in any other book, can be a subject, properly speaking, of discovery.

If I were to describe in a very few words the scope of Christianity, as a *revelation*,\* I should say, that it was to influence the conduct of human life, by establishing the proof of a future state of reward and punishment,—‘to bring life and immortality to light.’ The direct object, therefore, of the design is, to supply motives, and not rules; sanctions, and not precepts. And these were what mankind stood most in need of. The members of civilized society can, in all ordinary cases, judge tolerably well how they ought to act: but without a future state, or, which is the same thing, without credited evidence of that state, they want a *motive* to their duty; they want at least strength of motive, sufficient to bear up against the force of passion, and the temptation of present advantage. Their rules want authority. The most important service that can be rendered

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\* Great and inestimably beneficial effects may accrue from the mission of Christ, and especially from his death, which do not belong to Christianity as a *revelation*; that is, they might have existed, and they might have been accomplished, though we had never, in this life, been made acquainted with them. These effects may be very extensive: they may be interesting even to other orders of intelligent beings. I think it is a general opinion, and one to which I have long come, that the beneficial effects of Christ's death extend to the whole human species. It was the redemption of the world. ‘He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world;’ 1 John ii. 2. Probably the future happiness, perhaps the future existence of the species, and more gracious terms of acceptance extended to *all*, might depend upon it, or be procured by it. Now these effects, whatever they be, do not belong to Christianity as a *revelation*; because they exist with respect to those to whom *it is not revealed*.

to human life, and that consequently, which, one might expect beforehand, would be the great end and office of a revelation from God, is to convey to the world authorized assurances of the reality of a future existence. And although in doing this, or by the ministry of the same person by whom this is done, moral precepts or examples, or illustrations of moral precepts, may be occasionally given, and be highly valuable, yet still they do not form the original purpose of the mission.

Secondly; morality, neither in the Gospel, nor in any other book, can be a subject of discovery, properly so called. By which proposition, I mean that there cannot, in morality, be any thing similar to what are called discoveries in natural philosophy, in the arts of life, and in some sciences; as the system of the universe, the circulation of the blood, the polarity of the magnet, the laws of gravitation, alphabetical writing, decimal arithmetic, and some other things of the same sort; facts, or proofs, or contrivances, before totally unknown and unthought of. Whoever, therefore, expects, in reading the New Testament, to be struck with discoveries in morals in the manner in which his mind was affected when he first came to the knowledge of the discoveries above-mentioned; or rather in the manner in which the world was affected by them, when they were first published; expects what, as I apprehend, the nature of the subject renders it impossible that he should meet with. And the foundation of my opinion is this, that the qualities of actions depend entirely upon their effects, which effects must all along have been the subject of human experience.

When it is once settled, no matter upon what principle, that to do good is virtue, the rest is calculation. But since the calculation cannot be instituted concerning each particular action, we establish intermediate rules; by which proceeding, the business of morality is much facilitated, for then it is concerning our rules alone that we need inquire, whether in their tendency they be beneficial; concerning our actions, we have only to ask, whether they be agreeable to the rules. We refer actions to rules, and rules to public happiness. Now, in the formation of these rules, there is no place for discovery, properly so called, but there is ample room for the exercise of wisdom, judgment, and prudence.

As I wish to deliver argument rather than panegyric, I shall treat of the morality of the Gospel, in subjection to these observations. And after all, I think it such a morality, as, considering from whom it came, is most extraordinary; and such as, without allowing some degree of reality to the character and pretensions of the religion, it is difficult to account for: or, to place the argument a little lower in the scale, it is such a morality as completely repels the supposition of its being the tradition of a barbarous age or of a barbarous people, of the religion being founded in folly, or of its being the production of craft; and it repels also, in a great degree, the supposition of its having been the effusion of an enthusiastic mind.

The division, under which the subject may be most conveniently treated, is that of the things taught, and the manner of teaching.

Under the first head, I should willingly, if the limits and nature of my work admitted of it, transcribe into this chapter the whole of what has been said upon the morality of the Gospel, by the author of *The Internal Evidence of Christianity*; because it perfectly agrees with my own opinion, and because it is impossible to say the same things so well. This acute observer of human nature, and, as I believe, sincere convert to Christianity, appears to me to have made out satisfactorily the two following positions, viz.

I. That the Gospel omits some qualities, which have usually engaged the praises and admiration of mankind, but which, in reality, and in their general effects, have been prejudicial to human happiness.

II. That the Gospel has brought forward some virtues, which possess the highest intrinsic value, but which have commonly been overlooked and contemned.

The first of these propositions he exemplifies in the instances of friendship, patriotism, active courage; in the sense in which these qualities are usually understood, and in the conduct which they often produce.

The second, in the instances of passive courage or endurance of sufferings, patience under affronts and injuries, humility, irascibility, placability.

The truth is, there are two opposite descriptions of character, under which mankind may generally be classed. The one possesses vigor, firmness, resolution; is daring and active, quick in its sensibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in its attachments, inflexible in its purpose, violent in its resentments.

The other, meek, yielding, complying, forgiving; not prompt to act, but willing to suffer; silent and gentle under rudeness and insult, suing for reconciliation where others would demand satisfaction, giving way to the pushes of impudence, conceding and indulgent to the prejudices, the wrongheadedness, the intractability, of those with whom it has to deal.

The former of these characters is, and ever hath been, the favorite of the world. It is the character of great men. There is a dignity in it which universally commands respect.

The latter is poor-spirited, tame, and abject. Yet so it hath happened, that, with the Founder of Christianity, this latter is the subject of his commendation, his precepts, his examples; and that the former is so, in no part of its composition. This and nothing else, is the character designed in the following remarkable passages: 'Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also: and if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also: and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain: love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.' This certainly is not common-place morality. It is very original. It shows at least (and it is for this purpose we produce it) that no two

things can be more different than the Heroic and the Christian character.

Now the author, to whom I refer, has not only marked this difference more strongly than any preceding writer, but has proved, in contradiction to first impressions, to popular opinion, to the encomiums of orators and poets, and even to the suffrages of historians and moralists, that the latter character possesses the most of true worth, both as being most difficult either to be acquired or sustained, and as contributing most to the happiness and tranquillity of social life. The state of his argument is as follows :

I. If this disposition were universal, the case is clear; the world would be a society of friends. Whereas, if the other disposition were universal, it would produce a scene of universal contention. The world could not hold a generation of such men.

II. If, what is the fact, the disposition be partial; if a few be actuated by it, amongst a multitude who are not; in whatever degree it does prevail, in the same proportion it prevents, allays, and terminates, quarrels, the great disturbers of human happiness, and the great sources of human misery, so far as man's happiness and misery depend upon man. Without this disposition, enmities must not only be frequent, but, once begun, must be eternal: for, each retaliation being a fresh injury, and, consequently, requiring a fresh *satisfaction*, no period can be assigned to the reciprocation of affronts, and to the progress of hatred, but that which closes the lives, or at least the intercourse, of the parties.

I would only add to these observations, that although the former of the two characters above described may be occasionally useful; although, perhaps, a great general, or a great statesman, may be formed by it, and these may be instruments of important benefits to mankind; yet is this nothing more than what is true of many qualities, which are acknowledged to be vicious. *Envy* is a quality of this sort; I know not a stronger stimulus to exertion; many a scholar, many an artist, many a soldier, has been produced by it; nevertheless, since in its general effects it is noxious, it is properly condemned, certainly is not praised, by sober moralists.

It was a portion of the same character as that we are defending, or rather of his love of the same character, which our Saviour displayed, in his repeated correction of the ambition of his disciples; his frequent admonitions, that greatness with them was to consist in humility; his censure of that love of distinction, and greediness of superiority, which the chief persons amongst his countrymen were wont, on all occasions, great and little, to betray. 'They (the Scribes and Pharisees) love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But he not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren; and call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven; neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ; but he that is greatest among *you*, shall be your servant; and whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that

shall humble himself, shall be exalted.\* I make no farther remark upon these passages (because they are, in truth, only a repetition of the doctrine, different expressions of the principle, which we have already stated), except that some of the passages, especially our Lord's advice to the guests at an entertainment,† seem to extend the rule to what we call *manners*; which was both regular in point of consistency, and not so much beneath the dignity of our Lord's mission as may at first sight be supposed, for bad manners are bad morals.

It is sufficiently apparent, that the precepts we have cited, or rather the disposition which these precepts inculcate, relate to personal conduct from personal motives; to cases in which men act from impulse, for themselves, and from themselves. When it comes to be considered, what is necessary to be done for the sake of the public, and out of a regard to the general welfare (which consideration, for the most part, ought exclusively to govern the duties of men in public stations), it comes to a case to which the rules do not belong. This distinction is plain; and if it were less so, the consequence would not be much felt: for it is very seldom that, in the intercourse of private life, men act with public views. The personal motives, from which they do act, the rule regulates.

The preference of the patient to the heroic character, which we have here noticed, and which the reader will find explained at large in the work to which we have referred him, is a peculiarity in the Christian institution, which I propose as an argument of wisdom very much beyond the situation and natural character of the person who delivered it.

II. A *second* argument, drawn from the morality of the New Testament, is the stress which is laid by our Saviour upon the regulation of the thoughts. And I place this consideration next to the other, because they are connected. The other related to the malicious passions; this, to the voluptuous. Together, they comprehend the whole character.

'Out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications,' &c.—'These are the things which defile a man.†

'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but *within* they are full of extortion and excess.—Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness; even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but *within* ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.‡

And more particularly that strong expression,|| 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'

There can be no doubt, with any reflecting mind, but that the

\* Matt. xxiii. 6. See also Mark xii. 39. Luke xx. 46; xiv. 7.

† Luke xiv. 7.

‡ Matt. xxiii. 25. 27.

§ Matt. xv. 19.

|| Matt. v. 28.

propensities of our nature must be subject to regulation; but the question is, *where* the check ought to be placed, upon the thought, or only upon the action? In this question, our Saviour, in the texts here quoted, has pronounced a decisive judgment. He makes the control of thought essential. Internal purity with him is every thing. Now I contend that this is the only discipline which can succeed; in other words, that a moral system, which prohibits actions, but leaves the thoughts at liberty, will be ineffectual, and is therefore unwise. I know not how to go about the proof of a point, which depends upon experience, and upon a knowledge of the human constitution, better than by citing the judgment of persons, who appear to have given great attention to the subject, and to be well qualified to form a true opinion about it. Boerhaave, speaking of this very declaration of our Saviour, 'Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart,' and understanding it, as we do, to contain an injunction to lay the check upon the thoughts, was wont to say, that 'our Saviour knew mankind better than Socrates.' Haller, who has recorded this saying of Boerhaave, adds to it the following remarks of his own\*: 'It did not escape the observation of our Saviour, that the rejection of any evil thoughts was the best defence against vice: for when a debauched person fills his imagination with impure pictures, the licentious ideas which he recalls, fail not to stimulate his desires with a degree of violence which he cannot resist. This will be followed by gratification, unless some external obstacle should prevent him from the commission of a sin, which he had internally resolved on.' 'Every moment of time,' says our author, 'that is spent in meditations upon sin, increases the power of the dangerous object which has possessed our imagination.' I suppose these reflections will be generally assented to.

III. Thirdly, Had a teacher of morality been asked concerning a general principle of conduct, and for a short rule of life; and had he instructed the person who consulted him, 'constantly to refer his actions to what he believed to be the will of his Creator, and constantly to have in view not his own interest and gratification alone, but the happiness and comfort of those about him,' he would have been thought, I doubt not, in any age of the world, and in any, even the most improved, state of morals, to have delivered a judicious answer; because, by the first direction, he suggested the only motive which acts steadily and uniformly, in sight and out of sight, in familiar occurrences and under pressing temptations; and in the second, he corrected what, of all tendencies in the human character, stands most in need of correction, *selfishness*, or a contempt of other men's conveniency and satisfaction. In estimating the value of a moral rule, we are to have regard not only to the particular duty, but the general spirit; not only to what it directs us to do, but to the character which a compliance with its direction is likely to

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\* Letters to his Daughter.



form in us. So, in the present instance, the rule here recited will never fail to make him who obeys it *considerate*, not only of the rights, but of the feelings of other men, bodily and mental; in great matters and in small; of the ease, the accommodation, the self-complacency, of all with whom he has any concern, especially of all who are in his power, or dependent upon his will.

Now what, in the most applauded philosopher of the most enlightened age of the world, would have deemed worthy of his wisdom, and of his character, to say, our Saviour hath said, and upon just such an occasion as that which we have feigned.

'Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'\*

The second precept occurs in Saint Matthew (xix. 16.) on another occasion similar to this; and both of them, on a third similar occasion, in Luke (x. 27.) In these two latter instances, the question proposed was, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?'

Upon all these occasions, I consider the words of our Saviour as expressing precisely the same thing as what I have put into the mouth of the moral philosopher. Nor do I think that it detracts much from the merit of the answer, that these precepts are extant in the Mosaic code; for his laying his finger, if I may so say, upon these precepts; his drawing them out from the rest of that voluminous institution; his stating of them, not simply amongst the number, but as the greatest and the sum of all the others; in a word, his proposing of them to his hearers for their rule and principle, was our Saviour's own.

And what our Saviour had said upon the subject, appears to me to have *fixed* the sentiment amongst his followers.

Saint Paul has it expressly, 'If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;† and again, 'For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.‡'

Saint John, in like manner, 'This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.§'

Saint Peter, not very differently: 'Seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.¶'

And it is so well known, as to require no citations to verify it, that this love, or charity, or, in other words, regard to the welfare of others, runs in various forms through all the preceptive parts of

\* Matt. xxii. 35—40.

§ 1 John iv. 21.

† Rom. xiii. 9.

¶ 1 Peter i. 22.

‡ Gal. v. 14.

the apostolic writings. It is the theme of all their exhortations, that with which their morality begins and ends, from which all their details and enumerations set out, and into which they return.

And that this temper, for some time at least, descended in its purity to succeeding Christians, is attested by one of the earliest and best of the remaining writings of the apostolical fathers, the epistle of the Roman Clement. The meekness of the Christian character reigns throughout the whole of that excellent piece. The occasion called for it. It was to compose the dissensions of the church of Corinth. And the venerable hearer of the apostles does not fall short, in the display of this principle, of the finest passages of their writings. He calls to the remembrance of the Corinthian church its former character, in which 'ye were all of you,' he tells them, 'humble-minded, not boasting of any thing, desiring rather to be subject than to govern, to give, than to receive, being content with the portion God had dispensed to you, and hearkening diligently to his word; ye were enlarged in your bowels, having his sufferings always before your eyes. Ye contended day and night for the whole brotherhood, that with compassion and a good conscience the number of his elect might be saved. Ye were sincere, and without offence, towards each other. Ye bewailed every one his neighbor's sins, esteeming their defects your own.\* His prayer for them was for the 'return of peace, long-suffering, and patience.† And his advice to those, who might have been the occasion of difference in the society, is conceived in the true spirit, and with a perfect knowledge, of the Christian character: 'Who is there among you that is generous? who that is compassionate? who that has any charity? Let him say, If this sedition, this contention, and these schisms, be upon my account, I am ready to depart, to go away whithersoever ye please, and do whatsoever ye shall command me: only let the flock of Christ be in peace with the elders who are set over it. He that shall do this, shall get to himself a very great honor in the Lord; and there is no place but what will be ready to receive him: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. These things they, who have their conversation towards God, not to be repented of, both have done, and will always be ready to do.†

This sacred principle, this earnest recommendation of forbearance, lenity, and forgiveness, mixes with all the writings of that age. There are more quotations in the apostolical fathers, of texts which relate to these points, than of any other. Christ's sayings had struck them. 'Not rendering,' said Polycarp, the disciple of John, 'evil for evil, or railing for railing, or striking for striking, or cursing for cursing.‡ Again, speaking of some whose behavior had given great offence, 'Be ye moderate,' says he, 'on this occasion, and look not upon such as enemies, but call them back as suffering and erring members, that ye save your whole body.'||

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\* Ep. Clem. Rom. c. 2; Abp. Wake's Translation.

† Ib. c. 54.

§ Pol. Ep. Ad. Phil. c. 2.

† Ib. c. 53.

|| Ib. c. 11.

'Be ye mild at their anger,' saith Ignatius, the companion of Polycarp, 'humble at their boastings, to their blasphemies return your prayers, to their error your firmness in the faith; when they are cruel, be ye gentle; not endeavoring to imitate their ways, let us be their brethren in all kindness and moderation: but let us be followers of the Lord; for who was ever more unjustly used, more destitute, more despised?'

IV. A fourth quality, by which the morality of the Gospel is distinguished, is the exclusion of regard to fame and reputation.

'Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in Heaven.\*

'When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.†

And the rule, by parity of reason, is extended to all other virtues.

I do not think, that either in these, or in any other passage of the New Testament, the pursuit of fame is stated as a vice; it is only said that an action, to be virtuous, must be independent of it. I would also observe, that it is not publicity, but ostentation, which is prohibited; not the mode, but the motive, of the action, which is regulated. A good man will prefer that mode, as well as those objects of his beneficence, by which he can produce the greatest effect; and the view of this purpose may dictate sometimes publication, and sometimes concealment. Either the one or the other may be the *mode* of the action, according as the end to be promoted by it appears to require. But from the *motive*, the reputation of the deed, and the fruits and advantage of that reputation to ourselves, must be shut out, or, in whatever proportion they are not so, the action in that proportion fails of being virtuous.

This exclusion of regard to human opinion, is a difference, not so much in the duties to which the teachers of virtue would persuade mankind, as in the manner and topics of persuasion. And in this view the difference is great. When we set about to give advice, our lectures are full of the advantages of character, of the regard that is due to appearances and to opinion; of what the world, especially of what the good or great, will think and say; of the value of public esteem, and of the qualities by which men acquire it. Widely different from this was our Saviour's instruction; and the difference was founded upon the best reasons. For, however the care of reputation, the authority of public opinion, or even of the opinion of good men, the satisfaction of being well received and well thought of, the benefit of being known and distinguished, are topics to which we are fain to have recourse in our exhortations; the true virtue is that which discards these considerations absolutely, and which retires from them all to the single internal purpose of pleasing God. This at least was the virtue which our Saviour taught. And in teaching this, he not only confined the views of his followers

\* Matt. vi. 1.

† Matt. vi. 6.

to the proper measure and principle of human duty, but acted in consistency with his office as a monitor from heaven.

NEXT to what our Saviour taught, may be considered the manner of his teaching: which was extremely peculiar, yet, I think, precisely adapted to the peculiarity of his character and situation. His lessons did not consist of disquisitions; of any thing like moral essays, or like sermons, or like set treatises upon the several points which he mentioned. When he delivered a precept, it was seldom that he added any proof or argument: still more seldom, that he accompanied it with, what all precepts require, limitations and distinctions. His instructions were conceived in short, emphatic, sententious rules, in occasional reflections, or in round maxims. I do not think that this was a natural, or would have been a proper method for a philosopher or a moralist; or that it is a method which can be successfully imitated by us. But I contend that it was suitable to the character which Christ assumed, and to the situation in which, as a teacher, he was placed. He produced himself as a messenger from God. He put the truth of what he taught upon authority.\* In the choice, therefore, of his mode of teaching, the purpose by him to be consulted was *impression*: because conviction, which forms the principal end of our discourses, was to arise in the minds of his followers from a different source, from their respect to his person and authority. Now, for the purpose of impression singly and exclusively (I repeat again, that we are not here to consider the convincing of the understanding), I know nothing which would have so great force as strong ponderous maxims, frequently urged, and frequently brought back to the thoughts of the hearers. I know nothing that could in this view be said better, than 'Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you?' 'The first and great commandment is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' It must also be remembered, that our Lord's ministry, upon the supposition either of one year or three, compared with his work, was of short duration; that, within this time, he had many places to visit, various audiences to address; that his person was generally besieged by crowds of followers: that he was, sometimes, driven away from the place where he was teaching by persecution, and at other times, thought fit to withdraw himself from the commotions of the populace. Under these circumstances, nothing appears to have been so practicable, or likely to be so efficacious, as leaving, wherever he came, concise lessons of duty. These circumstances at least show the necessity he was under of comprising what he delivered within a small compass. In particular, his sermon upon the mount ought always to be considered with a view to these observations. The question is not, whether a fuller, a more accurate, a more systematic, or a more argumentative, discourse upon morals

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\* 'I say unto you, Swear not at all; I say unto you, Resist not evil; I say unto you, Love your enemies.'—Matt. v. 34. 39. 44.

might not have been pronounced; but whether more could have been said in the same room, better adapted to the exigencies of the hearers, or better calculated for the purpose of impression? Seen in this light, it has always appeared to me to be admirable. Dr. Lardner thought that this discourse was made up of what Christ had said at different times, and on different occasions, several of which occasions are noticed in Saint Luke's narrative. I can perceive no reason for this opinion. I believe that our Lord delivered this discourse at one time and place, in the manner related by Saint Matthew, and that he repeated the same rules and maxims at different times, as opportunity or occasion suggested; that they were often in his mouth, and were repeated to different audiences, and in various conversations.

It is incidental to this mode of moral instruction, which proceeds not by proof but upon authority, not by disquisition but by precept, that the rules will be conceived in absolute terms, leaving the application, and the distinctions that attend it, to the reason of the hearer. It is likewise to be expected that they will be delivered in terms by so much the more forcible and energetic, as they have to encounter natural or general propensities. It is farther also to be remarked, that many of those strong instances, which appear in our Lord's sermon, such as, 'If any man will smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also:' 'If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also:' 'Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain:' though they appear in the form of specific precepts, are intended as descriptive of disposition and character. A specific compliance with the precepts would be of little value, but the disposition which they inculcate is of the highest. He who should content himself with waiting for the occasion, and with literally observing the rule when the occasion offered, would do nothing or worse than nothing: but he who considers the character and disposition which is hereby inculcated, and places that disposition before him as the model to which he should bring his own, takes, perhaps, the best possible method of improving the benevolence, and of calming and rectifying the vices, of his temper.

If it be said, that this disposition is unattainable, I answer, so is all perfection: ought therefore a moralist to recommend imperfections? One excellency, however, of our Saviour's rules, is, that they are either never mistaken, or never so mistaken as to do harm. I could feign a hundred cases, in which the literal application of the rule, 'of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us,' might mislead us: but I never yet met with the man who was actually misled by it. Notwithstanding that our Lord bade his followers 'not to resist evil,' and 'to forgive the enemy who should trespass against them, not till seven times, but till seventy times seven,' the Christian world has hitherto suffered little by too much placability or forbearance. I would repeat once more, what has already been twice remarked, that these rules were designed to

regulate personal conduct from personal motives, and for this purpose alone.

I think that these observations will assist us greatly in placing our Saviour's conduct, as a moral teacher, in a proper point of view; especially when it is considered, that to deliver moral disquisitions was no part of his design,—to teach morality at all was only a subordinate part of it; his great business being to supply, what was much more wanting than lessons of morality, stronger moral sanctions, and clearer assurances of a future judgment.\*

The *parables* of the New Testament are, many of them, such as would have done honor to any book in the world; I do not mean in style and diction, but in the choice of the subjects, in the structure of the narratives, in the aptness, propriety, and force of the circumstances woven into them; and in some, as that of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the Pharisee and the publican, in a union of pathos and simplicity, which, in the best productions of human genius, is the fruit only of a much exercised and well-cultivated judgment.

The *Lord's Prayer*, for a succession of solemn thoughts, for fixing the attention upon a few great points, for suitableness to every condition, for sufficiency, for conciseness without obscurity, for the weight and real importance of its petitions, is without an equal or a rival.

From whence did these come? Whence had this man his wisdom? Was our Saviour, in fact, a well-instructed philosopher, whilst he is represented to us as an illiterate peasant? Or shall we say that some early Christians of taste and education composed these pieces and ascribed them to Christ? Beside all other incredibilities in this account, I answer, with Dr. Jortin, that they *could not* do it. No specimens of composition, which the Christians of the first century have left us, authorize us to believe that they were equal to the task. And how little qualified the Jews, the countrymen and companions of Christ, were to assist him in the undertaking, may be judged of from the traditions and writings of theirs which were the nearest to that age. The whole collection of the Talmud is one continued proof, into what follies they fell whenever they left their

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\* Some appear to require a religious system, or, in the books which profess to deliver that system, minute directions, for every case and occurrence that may arise. This, say they, is necessary to render a revelation perfect, especially one which has for its object the regulation of human conduct. Now, how prolix, yet how incomplete and unavailing, such an attempt must have been, is proved by one notable example: 'The Indoo and Mussulman religion are institutes of civil law, regulating the minutest questions both of property, and of all questions which come under the cognizance of the magistrate. And to what length details of this kind are necessarily carried, when once begun, may be understood from an anecdote of the Mussulman code, which we have received from the most respectable authority, that not less than *seventy-five thousand* traditional precepts have been promulgated.' (Hamilton's Translation of Hedaya, or Guide.)

Bible; and how little capable they were of furnishing out such lessons as Christ delivered.

But there is still another view, in which our Lord's discourses deserve to be considered; and that is, in their *negative* character,—not in what they did, but in what they did not, contain. Under this head, the following reflections appear to me to possess some weight.

I. They exhibit no particular description of the invisible world. The future happiness of the good, and the misery of the bad, which is all we want to be assured of, is directly and positively affirmed, and is represented by metaphors and comparisons, which were plainly intended as metaphors and comparisons, and as nothing more. As to the rest, a solemn reserve is maintained. The question concerning the woman who had been married to seven brothers, 'Whose shall she be on the resurrection?' was of a nature calculated to have drawn from Christ a more circumstantial account of the state of the human species in their future existence. He cut short, however, the inquiry, by an answer, which at once rebuked intruding curiosity, and was agreeable to the best apprehensions we are able to form upon the subject, viz. 'That they who are accounted worthy of that resurrection, shall be as the angels of God in heaven.' I lay a stress upon this reserve, because it repels the suspicion of enthusiasm: for enthusiasm is wont to expatiate upon the condition of the departed, above all other subjects; and with a wild particularity. It is moreover a topic which is always listened to with greediness. The teacher, therefore, whose principal purpose is to draw upon himself attention, is sure to be full of it. The Koran of Mahomet is half made up of it.

II. Our Lord enjoined no austerities. He not only enjoined none as absolute duties, but he recommended none as carrying men to a higher degree of divine favor. Place Christianity, in this respect, by the side of all institutions which have been founded in the fanaticism, either of their author, or of his first followers; or rather compare, in this respect, Christianity as it came from Christ, with the same religion after it fell into other hands; with the extravagant merit very soon ascribed to celibacy, solitude, voluntary poverty; with the rigors of an ascetic, and the vows of a monastic life; the hair shirt, the watchings, the midnight prayers, the obmutescence, the gloom and mortification of religious orders, and of those who aspired to religious perfection.

III. Our Saviour uttered no impassioned devotion. There was no heat in his piety, or in the language in which he expressed it; no vehement or rapturous ejaculations, no violent urgency, in his prayers. The Lord's Prayer is a model of calm devotion. His words, in the garden are unaffected expressions, of a deep indeed, but sober, piety. He never appears to have been worked up into any thing like that elation, or that emotion of spirit which is occasionally observed in most of those, to whom the name of enthusiast can in any degree be applied. I feel a respect for Methodists, because I believe that there is to be found amongst them much sincere piety,

and availing, though not always well-informed, Christianity: yet I never attended a meeting of theirs, but I came away with the reflection, how different what I heard was from what I read! I do not mean in doctrine, with which at present I have no concern, but in manner; how different from the calmness, the sobriety, the good sense, and I may add, the strength and authority, of our Lord's discourses!

IV: It is very usual with the human mind, to substitute forwardness and fervency in a particular cause, for the merit of general and regular morality; and it is natural, and politic also, in the leader of a sect or party, to encourage such a disposition in his followers. Christ did not overlook this turn of thought; yet, though avowedly placing himself at the head of a new institution, he notices it only to condemn it. 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto you I never knew you: depart from me, *ye that work iniquity*.\*' So far was the author of Christianity from courting the attachment of his followers by any sacrifice of principle, or by a condescension to the errors which even zeal in his service might have inspired! This was a proof both of sincerity and judgment.

V. Nor, fifthly, did he fall in with any of the depraved fashions of his country, or with the natural bias of his own education. Bred up a Jew, under a religion extremely technical, in an age and amongst a people more tenacious of the ceremonies than of any other part of that religion, he delivered an institution, containing less of ritual, and that more simple than is to be found in any religion which ever prevailed amongst mankind. We have known, I do allow, examples of an enthusiasm, which has swept away all external ordinances before it. But this spirit certainly did not dictate our Saviour's conduct, either in his treatment of the religion of his country, or in the formation of his own institution. In both, he displayed the soundness and moderation of his judgment. He censured an overstrained scrupulousness, or perhaps an affectation of scrupulousness, about the sabbath: but how did he censure it? not by contemning or decrying the institution itself, but by declaring that 'the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath;' that is to say, that the sabbath was to be subordinate to its purpose, and that that purpose was the real good of those who were the subjects of the law. The same concerning the nicety of some of the Pharisees, in paying tithes of the most trifling articles, accompanied with a neglect of justice, fidelity, and mercy. He finds fault with them for misplacing their anxiety. He does not speak disrespectfully of the law of tithes, nor of their observance of it; but he assigns to

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\* Matt. vii. 21, 22.



each class of duties its proper station in the scale of moral importance. All this might be expected perhaps from a well-instructed, cool, and judicious philosopher, but was not to be looked for from an illiterate Jew; certainly not from an impetuous enthusiast.

VI. Nothing could be more quibbling, than were the comments and expositions of the Jewish doctors at that time; nothing so puerile as their distinctions. Their evasion of the fifth commandment, their exposition of the law of oaths, are specimens of the bad taste in morals which then prevailed. Whereas, in a numerous collection of our Saviour's apophthegms; many of them referring to sundry precepts of the Jewish law, there is not to be found one example of sophistry, or of false subtilty, or of any thing approaching thereunto.

VII. The national temper of the Jews was intolerant, narrow-minded, and excluding. In Jesus, on the contrary, whether we regard his lessons or his example, we see not only benevolence, but benevolence the most enlarged and comprehensive. In the parable of the good Samaritan, the very point of the story is, that the person relieved by him, was the national and religious enemy of his benefactor. Our Lord declared the equity of the divine administration; when he told the Jews (what, probably, they were surprised to hear), 'That many should come from the east and west, and should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but that the children of the kingdom should be cast into outer darkness.\*' His reproof of the hasty zeal of his disciples, who would needs call down fire from heaven to revenge an affront put upon their Master, shows the lenity of his character, and of his religion; and his opinion of the manner in which the most unreasonable opponents ought to be treated, or at least of the manner in which they ought not to be treated. The terms in which his rebuke was conveyed, deserve to be noticed:—'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.†'

VIII. Lastly, amongst the negative qualities of our religion, as it came out of the hands of its Founder and his apostles, we may reckon its complete abstraction from all views either of ecclesiastical or civil policy; or, to meet a language much in fashion with some men, from the politics either of priests or statesmen. Christ's declaration, that 'his kingdom was not of this world,' recorded by Saint John; his evasion of the question, whether it was lawful or not to give tribute unto Cæsar, mentioned by the three other evangelists; his reply to an application that was made to him, to interpose his authority in a question of property; 'Man, who made me a ruler or a judge over you?' ascribed to him by Saint Luke; his declining to exercise the office of a criminal judge in the case of the woman taken in adultery, as related by John, are all intelligible significations of our Saviour's sentiments upon this head. And with respect to *politics*, in the usual sense of that word, or discussions concerning different forms of government, Christianity declines every question upon the subject. Whilst politicians are disputing

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\* Matt. viii. 11.

† Luke ix. 55.

about monarchies, aristocracies, and republics, the gospel is alike applicable, useful, and friendly, to them all; inasmuch as, 1st, it tends to make men virtuous, and as it is easier to govern good men than bad men under any constitution; as, 2dly, it states obedience to government in ordinary cases, to be not merely a submission to force, but a duty of conscience; as, 3dly, it induces dispositions favorable to public tranquillity, a Christian's chief care being to pass quietly through this world to a better; as, 4thly, it prays for communities, and for the governors of communities, of whatever description or denomination they be, with a solicitude and fervency proportioned to the influence which they possess upon human happiness. All which, in my opinion, is just as it should be. Had there been more to be found in Scripture of a political nature, or convertible to political purposes, the worst use would have been made of it, on whichever side it seemed to lie.

When, therefore, we consider Christ as a moral teacher (remembering that this was only a secondary part of his office; and that morality, by the nature of the subject, does not admit of discovery, properly so called);—when we consider either what he taught, or what he did not teach, either the substance or the manner of his instruction; his preference of solid to popular virtues, of a character which is commonly despised to a character which is universally extolled; his placing, in our licentious vices, the check in the right place, viz. upon the thoughts; his collecting of human duty into two well-devised rules, his repetition of these rules, the stress he laid upon them, especially in comparison with positive duties, and his fixing thereby the sentiments of his followers; his exclusion of all regard to reputation in our devotion and alms, and, by parity of reason, in our other virtues;—when we consider that his instructions were delivered in a form calculated for impression, the precise purpose in his situation to be consulted; and that they were illustrated by parables, the choice and structure of which would have been admired in any composition whatever;—when we observe him free from the usual symptoms of enthusiasm; heat and vehemence in devotion, austerity in institutions, and a wild particularity in the description of a future state; free also from the depravities of his age and country; without superstition amongst the most superstitious of men, yet not decrying positive distinctions or external observances, but soberly calling them to the principle of their establishment, and to their place in the scale of human duties; without sophistry or trifling, amidst teachers remarkable for nothing so much as frivolous subtilties and quibbling expositions; candid and liberal in his judgment of the rest of mankind, although belonging to a people who affected a separate claim to divine favor, and, in consequence of that opinion, prone to uncharitableness, partiality, and restitution;—when we find, in his religion, no scheme of building up a hierarchy, or of ministering to the views of human governments;—in a word, when we compare Christianity, as it came from its Author, either with other religions, or with itself in other hands, the most reluctant understanding will be induced to acknowledge

the probity, I think also the good sense, of those to whom it owes its origin; and that some regard is due to the testimony of such men, when they declare their knowledge that the religion proceeded from God; and when they appeal, for the truth of their assertion, to miracles which they wrought, or which they saw.

Perhaps the qualities which we observe in the religion, may be thought to prove something more. They would have been extraordinary, had the religion come from any person; from the person from whom it did come, they are exceedingly so. What was Jesus in external appearance? A Jewish peasant, the son of a carpenter, living with his father and mother in a remote province of Palestine, until the time that he produced himself in his public character. He had no master to instruct or prompt him; he had read no books, but the works of Moses and the prophets; he had visited no polished cities; he had received no lessons from Socrates or Plato,—nothing to form in him a taste or judgment different from that of the rest of his countrymen, and of persons of the same rank of life with himself. Supposing it to be true, which it is not, that all his points of morality might be picked out of Greek and Roman writings, they were writings which *he* had never seen. Supposing them to be no more than what some or other had taught in various times and places, he could not collect them together.

Who were his coadjutors in the undertaking,—the persons into whose hands the religion came after his death? A few fishermen upon the lake of Tiberias, persons just as uneducated, and, for the purpose of framing rules of morality, as unpromising as himself. Suppose the mission to be real, all this is accounted for; the unsuitableness of the authors to the production, of the characters to the undertaking, no longer surprises us: but without *reality*, it is very difficult to explain, how such a system should proceed from such persons. Christ was not like any other carpenter; the apostles were not like any other fishermen.

But the subject is not exhausted by these observations. That portion of it, which is most reducible to points of argument, has been stated, and, I trust, truly. There are, however, some topics of a more diffuse nature, which yet deserve to be proposed to the reader's attention.

The *character of Christ* is a part of the morality of the gospel: one strong observation upon which is, that, neither as represented by his followers, nor as attacked by his enemies, is he charged with any personal vice. This remark is as old as Origen: 'Though innumerable lies and calumnies had been forged against the venerable Jesus, none had dared to charge him with an intemperance.\*' Not a reflection upon his moral character, not an imputation or suspicion of any offence against purity and chastity, appears for five hundred years after his birth. This faultlessness is more peculiar than we are apt to imagine. Some stain pollutes the morals or the

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\* Or. Ep. Cels. 1. 3. num. 36. ed. Bened.

morality of almost every other teacher, and of every other lawgiver.\* Zeno the stoic, and Diogenes the cynic, fell into the foulest impurities; of which also Socrates himself was more than suspected. Solon forbade unnatural crimes to slaves, Lycurgus tolerated theft as a part of education. Plato recommended a community of women. Aristotle maintained the general right of making war upon barbarians. The elder Cato was remarkable for the ill usage of his slaves: the younger gave up the person of his wife. One loose principle is found in almost all the Pagan moralists; is distinctly, however, perceived in the writings of Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus; and that is, the allowing, and even the recommending to their disciples, a compliance with the religion, and with the religious rites, of every country into which they came. In speaking of the founders of new institutions, we cannot forget Mahomet. His licentious transgressions of his own licentious rules; his abuse of the character which he assumed, and of the power which he had acquired, for the purposes of personal and privileged indulgence; his avowed claim of a special permission from heaven of unlimited sensuality, is known to every reader, as it is confessed by every writer, of the Moslem story.

Secondly, In the histories which are left us of Jesus Christ, although very short, and although dealing in narrative, and not in observation or panegyric, we perceive, beside the absence of every appearance of vice, traces of devotion, humility, benignity, mildness, patience, prudence. I speak of *traces* of these qualities, because the qualities themselves are to be collected from incidents; inasmuch as the terms are never used of Christ in the Gospels, nor is any formal character of him drawn in any part of the New Testament.

Thus we see the *devoutness* of his mind, in his frequent retirement to solitary prayer;† in his habitual giving of thanks;‡ in his reference of the beauties and operations of nature to the bounty of Providence;§ in his earnest addresses to his Father, more particularly that short but solemn one before the raising of Lazarus from the dead|| and in the deep piety of his behavior in the garden, on the last evening of his life:¶ his *humility*, in his constant reproof of contentions for superiority:\*\* the *benignity* and affectionateness of his temper, in his kindness to children;†† in the tears which he shed over his falling country;‡‡ and upon the death of his friend;§§ in his noticing of the widow's mite;||| in his parables of the good Samaritan, of the ungrateful servant, and of the Pharisee and publican, of which parables no one but a man of humanity could have been the

\* See many instances collected by Grotius, de Veritate Christianæ Religionis, in the notes to the second book, p. 116. Pocock's edition.

† Matt. xiv. 23. Luke ix. 28. Matt. xxvi. 36.

‡ Matt. xi. 25 Mark viii. 6. John vi. 23. Luke xxii. 17.

§ Matt. vi. 26—28.

|| John xi. 41.

¶ Matt. xxvi. 36—47.

\*\* Mark ix. 33.

†† Mark x. 16.

‡‡ Luke xix. 41.

§§ John xi. 35.

||| Mark xii. 42.

author: the *mildness* and lenity of his character is discovered, in his rebuke of the forward zeal of his disciples at the Samaritan village;\* in his expostulation with Pilate;† in his prayer for his enemies at the moment of his suffering,‡ which, though it has been since very properly and frequently imitated, was then, I apprehend, new: His *prudence* is discerned, where prudence is most wanted, in his conduct on trying occasions, and in answers to artful questions. Of these, the following are examples:—His withdrawing, in various instances, from the first symptoms of tumult,§ and with the express care, as appears from Saint Matthew,|| of carrying on his ministry in quietness; his declining every species of interference with the civil affairs of the country, which disposition is manifested by his behavior in the case of the woman caught in adultery,¶ and in his repulse of the application which was made to him, to interpose his decision about a disputed inheritance:\*\* his judicious, yet, as it should seem, unprepared answers, will be confessed in the case of the Roman tribute;†† in the difficulty concerning the interfering relations of a future state, as proposed to him in the instance of a woman who had married seven brethren;‡‡ and, more especially, in his reply to those who demanded from him an explanation of the authority by which he acted, which reply consisted, in propounding a question to them, situated between the very difficulties into which they were insidiously endeavoring to draw him. §§

Our Saviour's lessons, besides what has already been remarked in them, touch, and that oftentimes by very affecting representations, upon some of the most interesting topics of human duty, and of human meditation: upon the principles, by which the decisions of the last day will be regulated:|||| upon the superior, or rather the supreme, importance of religion:¶¶ upon penitence, by the most pressing calls and the most encouraging invitations;\*\*\* upon self-denial,††† watchfulness,‡‡‡ placability,§§§ confidence in God,||||| the value of spiritual, that is, of mental worship,¶¶¶ the necessity of moral obedience, and the directing of that obedience to the spirit and principle of the law, instead of seeking for evasions in a technical construction of its terms.\*\*\*\*

If we extend our argument to other parts of the New Testament, we may offer, as amongst the best and shortest rules of life, or, which is the same thing, descriptions of virtue, that have ever been delivered, the following passages:

‘Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, is this;

\* Luke ix. 55.

† John xix. 11.

‡ Luke xxiii. 34.

§ Matt. xiv. 22. Luke v. 15, 16. John v. 13. vi. 15.

|| Chap. xii. 19.

¶ John viii. 1.

\*\* Luke xii. 14.

†† Matt. xxii. 19.

‡‡ Matt. xxii. 28.

§§ Matt. xxi. 23, &c.

||| Matt. xxv. 31, &c.

¶¶ Mark viii. 35. Matt. vi. 31—33. Luke xii. 4, 5. 16—21.

\*\*\* Luke xv.

‡‡‡ Matt. v. 29.

|||| Mark xiii. 37. Matt. xxiv. 42.—xxv. 13.

§§§ Luke xvii. 4. Matt. xviii. 33, &c.

||||| Matt. vi. 25—30.

¶¶¶ John iv. 23, 24.

\*\*\*\* Matt. v. 21.

to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.\*

‘Now the end of the commandment is, charity, out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned.’†

‘For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.’‡

Enumerations of virtues and vices, and those sufficiently accurate, and unquestionably just, are given by Saint Paul to his converts in three several Epistles.§

The relative duties of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of Christian teachers and their flocks, of governors and their subjects, are set forth by the same writer,|| not indeed with the copiousness, the detail, or the distinctness, of a moralist, who should, in these days, sit down to write chapters upon the subject, but with the leading rules and principles in each; and, above all, with truth, and with authority.

Lastly, the whole volume of the New Testament is replete with *piety*; with, what were almost unknown to heathen moralists, *devotional virtues*, the most profound veneration of the Deity, an habitual sense of his bounty and protection, a firm confidence in the final result of his counsels and dispensations, a disposition to resort, upon all occasions, to his mercy, for the supply of human wants, for assistance in danger, for relief from pain, for the pardon of sin.

### CHAP. III.

#### *The Candor of the Writers of the New Testament.*

I MAKE this candor to consist, in their putting down many passages, and noticing many circumstances, which no writer whatever was likely to have forged; and which no writer would have chosen to appear in his book, who had been careful to present the story in the most unexceptionable form, or who had thought himself at liberty to carve and mould the particulars of that story, according to his choice, or according to his judgment of the effect.

A strong and well-known example of the fairness of the evangelists, offers itself in their account of Christ's resurrection, namely, in their unanimously stating, that after he was risen, he appeared to his disciples alone, I do not mean that they have used the exclusive word *alone*; but that all the instances which they have recorded of his appearance, are instances of appearance to his disciples; that their reasonings upon it, and allusions to it, are confined to this supposition; and that, by one of them, Peter is made to say, ‘Him God

\* James i. 27.

† 1 Tim. i. 5.

‡ Tit. ii. 11, 12.

§ Gal. v. 19. Col. iii. 12. 1 Cor. xiii.

|| Eph. v. 33. vi. 1. 5. 2 Cor. vi. 6, 7. Rom. xiii.

raised up the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.\* The most common understanding must have perceived, that the history of the resurrection would have come with more advantage, if they had related that Jesus appeared, after he was risen, to his foes as well as his friends, to the Scribes and Pharisees, the Jewish council, and the Roman governor: or even if they had asserted the public appearance of Christ in general unqualified terms, without noticing, as they have done, the presence of his disciples on each occasion, and noticing it in such a manner as to lead their readers to suppose that none but disciples were present. They *could* have represented it in one way as well as the other. And if their point had been, to have the religion believed, whether true or false; if they had fabricated the story *ab initio*; or if they had been disposed either to have delivered their testimony as witnesses, or to have worked up their materials and information as historians, in such a manner as to render their narrative as specious and unobjectionable as they could; in a word, if they had thought of any thing but of the truth of the case, as they understood and believed it; they would, in their account of Christ's several appearances after his resurrection, at least have omitted this restriction. At this distance of time, the account as we have it, is perhaps more credible than it would have been the other way; because this manifestation of the historian's candor, is of more advantage to their testimony, than the difference in the circumstances of the account would have been to the nature of the evidence. But this is an effect which the evangelists would not foresee: and I think that it was by no means the case at the time when the books were composed.

Mr. Gibbon has argued for the genuineness of the Koran, from the confessions which it contains to the apparent disadvantage of the Mahometan cause.† The same defence vindicates the genuineness of our Gospels, and without prejudice to the cause at all.

There are some other inferences in which the evangelists honestly relate what, they must have perceived, would make against them.

Of this kind is John the Baptist's message, preserved by Saint Matthew, (xi. 2.) and Saint Luke (vii. 18.): 'Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?' To confess, still more to state, that John the Baptist had his doubts concerning the character of Jesus, could not but afford a handle to cavil and objection. But truth, like honesty, neglects appearances. The same observation, perhaps, holds concerning the apostasy of Judas.‡

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\* Acts x. 40, 41.

† Vol. ix. c. 50, note 96.

‡ I had once placed amongst these examples of fair concession, the remarkable words of Saint Matthew, in his account of Christ's appearance upon the Galilean mountain: 'And when they saw him, they wor-

John vi. 66. 'From that time, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.' Was it the part of a writer, who dealt in suppression and disguise, to put down *this* anecdote?

Or this, which Matthew has preserved? (xii. 58.) 'He did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.'

Again, in the same evangelist: (v. 17, 18.) 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil: for, verily, I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.' At the time the Gospels were written, the apparent tendency of Christ's mission was to diminish the authority of the Mosaic code, and it was so considered by the Jews themselves. It is very improbable, therefore, that, without the constraint of truth, Matthew should have ascribed a saying to Christ, which, *primo intuitu*, militated with the judgment of the age in which his Gospel was written. Marcion thought this text so objectionable that he altered the words, so as to invert the sense.\*

Once more: (Acts xxv. 18, 19.) 'They brought none accusations against him, of such things as I supposed, but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.' Nothing could be more in the character of a Roman governor than these words. But that is not precisely the point I am concerned with. A mere panegyrist, or a dishonest narrator, would not have represented his cause, or have made a great magistrate represent it, in this manner; *i. e.* in terms not a little disparaging, and bespeaking, on his part, much unconcern and indifference about the matter. The same observation may be repeated of the speech which is ascribed to Gallio, (Acts xviii. 15.) 'If it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.'

Lastly, where do we discern a stronger mark of candor, or less disposition to extol and magnify, than in the conclusion of the same history? in which the evangelist, after relating that Paul, on his first arrival at Rome, preached to the Jews from morning until evening, adds, 'And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.'

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shipped him; but some doubted.† I have since, however, been convinced by what is observed concerning this passage in Dr. Townshend's discourse‡ upon the resurrection, that the transaction, as related by Saint Matthew, was really this: 'Christ appeared first at a distance; the greater part of the company, the moment they saw him, worshipped, but some, as yet, *i. e.* upon the first distant view of his person, doubted; whereupon Christ came up§ to them, and spake to them,' &c.: that the doubt, therefore, was only a doubt at first, for a moment, and upon his being seen at a distance, and was afterward dispelled by his nearer approach, and by his entering into conversation with them.

\* Lardner, Cred. vol. xv. p. 452.

† Chap. xxviii. 17.

‡ Page 177.

§ Saint Matthew's words are, *Και προσελθων ο Ιησους, ελαλησεν αυτοις*. This intimates, that, when he first appeared, it was at a distance, at least from many of the spectators. lb. p. 197.



The following, I think, are passages which were very unlikely to have presented themselves to the mind of a forger or a fabulist.

Matt. xxi. 21. 'Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done unto the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done; all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, it shall be done.\*' It appears to me very improbable that these words should have been put into Christ's mouth, if he had not actually spoken them. The term 'faith,' as here used, is perhaps rightly interpreted of confidence in that internal notice, by which the apostles were admonished of their power to perform any particular miracle. And this exposition renders the sense of the text more easy. But the words, undoubtedly, in their obvious construction, carry with them a difficulty, which no writer would have brought upon himself officiously.

Luke ix. 59. 'And he said unto another, Follow me: but he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.†' This answer, though very expressive of the transcendent importance of religious concerns, was apparently harsh and repulsive; and such as would not have been made for Christ, if he had not really used it. At least some other instances would have been chosen.

The following passage, I, for the same reason, think impossible to have been the production of artifice, or of a cold forgery:—'But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire (Gehennæ).' Matt. v. 22. It is emphatic, cogent, and well calculated for the purpose of impression; but is inconsistent with the supposition of art or wariness on the part of the relater.

The short reply of our Lord to Mary Magdalen, after his resurrection, (John xx. 16, 17.) 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended unto my Father,' in my opinion, must have been founded in a reference or allusion to some prior conversation, for the want of knowing which, his meaning is hidden from us. This very obscurity, however, is a proof of genuineness. No one would have forged such an answer.

John vi. The whole of the conversation recorded in this chapter, is, in the highest degree, unlikely to be fabricated, especially the part of our Saviour's reply between the fiftieth and the fifty-eighth verse. I need only put down the first sentence: 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' Without calling in question the expositions that have been given of this passage, we

\* See also chap. xvii. 20. Luke xvii. 6.

† See also Matt. viii. 21.

may be permitted to say, that it labors under an obscurity, in which it is impossible to believe that any one, who made speeches for the persons of his narrative, would have voluntarily involved them. That this discourse was obscure, even at the time, is confessed by the writer who had preserved it, when he tells us, at the conclusion, that many of our Lord's disciples, when they had heard this, said, 'This is a hard saying; who can bear it?'

Christ's taking of a young child, and placing it in the midst of his contentious disciples, (Matt. xviii. 2.) though as decisive a proof as could be, of the benignity of his temper, and very expressive of the character of the religion which he wished to inculcate, was not by any means an obvious thought. Nor am I acquainted with any thing in any ancient writing which resembles it.

The account of the institution of the eucharist bears strong internal marks of genuineness. If it had been feigned, it would have been more full; it would have come nearer to the actual mode of celebrating the rite, as that mode obtained very early in Christian churches: and it would have been more formal than it is. In the forged piece, called the *Apostolic Constitutions*, the apostles are made to enjoin many parts of the ritual which was in use in the second and third centuries, with as much particularity as a modern rubric could have done. Whereas, in the *History of the Lord's supper*, as we read it in *Saint Matthew's Gospel*, there is not so much as the command to repeat it. This, surely, looks like undesignedness. I think also that the difficulty arising from the conciseness of Christ's expression, 'This is my body,' would have been avoided in a made-up story. I allow that the explications of these words, given by Protestants, is satisfactory; but it is deduced from a diligent comparison of the words in question with forms of expression used in Scripture, and especially by Christ upon other occasions. No writer would arbitrarily and unnecessarily have thus cast in his reader's way a difficulty, which, to say the least, it required research and erudition to clear up.

Now it ought to be observed, that the argument which is built upon these examples, extends both to the authenticity of the books and to the truth of the narrative: for it is improbable that the forger of a history in the name of another should have inserted such passages into it: and it is improbable also, that the persons whose names the books bear should have fabricated such passages; or even have allowed them a place in their work, if they had not believed them to express the truth.

The following observation, therefore, of Dr. Lardner, the most candid of all advocates, and the most cautious of all inquirers, seems to be well-founded:—'Christians are induced to believe the writers of the Gospel, by observing the evidences of piety and probity that appear in their writings, in which there is no deceit, or artifice, or cunning, or design.' 'No remarks,' as Dr. Beattie hath properly said, 'are thrown in, to anticipate objections; nothing of that caution, which never fails to distinguish the testimony of those who are

conscious of imposture; no endeavors to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative.

I beg leave to cite also another author,\* who has well expressed the reflection which the examples now brought forward were intended to suggest. 'It doth not appear that ever it came into the mind of these writers, to consider how this or the other action would appear to mankind, or what objections might be raised upon them. But without at all attending to this, they lay the facts before you, at no pains to think whether they would appear credible or not. If the reader will not believe their testimony, there is no help for it: they tell the truth, and attend to nothing else. Surely this looks like sincerity, and that they published nothing to the world but what they believed themselves.'

As no improper supplement to this chapter, I crave a place here for observing the extreme *naturalness* of some of the things related in the New Testament.

Mark ix. 23. 'Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' The struggle in the father's heart, between solicitude for the preservation of his child, and a kind of involuntary distrust of Christ's power to heal him, is here expressed with an air of reality, which could hardly be counterfeited.

Again, (Matt. xxi. 9.) the eagerness of the people to introduce Christ into Jerusalem, and their demand, a short time afterward, of his crucifixion, when he did not turn out what they expected him to be, so far from affording matter of objection, represents popular favor in exact agreement with nature and with experience, as the flux and reflux of a wave.

The rulers and Pharisees rejecting Christ, whilst many of the common people received him, was the effect which, in the then state of Jewish prejudices, I should have expected. And the reason with which they who rejected Christ's mission kept themselves in countenance, and with which also they answered the arguments of those who favored it, is precisely the reason which such men usually give:—'Have any of the scribes or Pharisees believed on him?' (John vii. 48.)

In our Lord's conversation at the well (John iv. 29.) Christ had surprised the Samaritan woman with an allusion to a single particular in her domestic situation, 'Thou hast had five husbands; and he, whom thou now hast, is not thy husband.' The woman, soon after this, ran back to the city, and called out to her neighbors, 'Come, see a man which told me *all things* that ever I did.' This exaggeration appears to me very natural; especially in the hurried state of spirits into which the woman may be supposed to have been thrown.

The lawyer's subtilty in running a distinction upon the word neighbor, in the precept, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,'

\* Duchal, p. 97, 98.

was no less natural, than our Saviour's answer was decisive and satisfactory (Luke x. 29.) The lawyer of the New Testament, it must be observed, was a Jewish divine.

The behavior of Gallio (Acts xviii. 12—17.) and of Festus (xxv. 18, 19.) have been observed upon already.

The consistency of Saint Paul's character throughout the whole of his history (*viz.* the warmth and activity of his zeal, first against, and then for Christianity), carries with it very much the appearance of truth.

There are also some *properties*, as they may be called, observable in the Gospels: that is, circumstances separately suiting with the situation, character, and intention, of their respective authors.

Saint Matthew, who was an inhabitant of Galilee, and did not join Christ's society until some time after Christ had come into Galilee to preach, has given us very little of his history prior to that period. Saint John, who had been converted before, and who wrote to supply omissions in the other Gospels, relates some remarkable particulars, which had taken place before Christ left Judea, to go into Galilee.\*

Saint Matthew (xv. 1.) has recorded the cavil of the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus, for eating 'with unclean hands.' Saint Mark has also (vii. 1.) recorded the same transaction (taken probably from Saint Matthew), but with this addition; 'For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands often, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders: and when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not: and many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables.' Now Saint Matthew was not only a Jew himself, but it is evident, from the whole structure of his Gospel, especially from his numerous references to the Old Testament, that he wrote for Jewish readers. The above explanation, therefore, in him, would have been unnatural, as not being wanted by the readers whom he addressed. But in Mark, who, whatever use he might make of Matthew's Gospel, intended his own narrative for a general circulation, and who himself travelled to distant countries in the service of the religion, it was properly added.

#### CHAP. IV.

##### *Identity of Christ's Character.*

THE argument expressed by this title, I apply principally to the comparison of the first three Gospels with that of Saint John. It is known to every reader of Scripture, that the passages of Christ's history, preserved by Saint John, are, except his passion and resurrection, for the most part, different from those which are delivered

\* Hartley's Observations, vol. ii. p. 103.

by the other evangelists. And I think the ancient account of this difference to be the true one, *viz.* that Saint John wrote *after* the rest, and to supply what he thought omissions in their narratives, of which the principal were our Saviour's conferences with the Jews of Jerusalem, and his discourses to his apostles at his last supper. But what I observe in the comparison of these several accounts is, that, although actions and discourses are ascribed to Christ by Saint John, in general different from what are given to him by the other evangelists, yet, under this diversity, there is a similitude of *manner*, which indicates that the actions and discourses proceeded from the same person. I should have laid little stress upon the repetition of actions substantially alike, or of discourses containing many of the same expressions, because that is a species of resemblance, which would either belong to a true history, or might easily be imitated in a false one. Nor do I deny, that a dramatic writer is able to sustain propriety and distinction of character, through a great variety of separate incidents and situations. But the evangelists were not dramatic writers; nor possessed the talents of dramatic writers; nor will it, I believe, be suspected, that they *studied* uniformity of character, or ever thought of any such thing, in the person who was the subject of their histories. Such uniformity, if it exists, is on their part casual; and if there be, as I contend there is, a perceptible resemblance of *manner*, in passages, and between discourses, which are in themselves extremely distinct, and are delivered by historians writing without any imitation of, or reference to, one another, it affords a just presumption, that these are, what they profess to be, the actions and the discourses of the same real person; that the evangelists wrote from fact, and not from imagination.

The article in which I find this agreement most strong, is in our Saviour's mode of teaching, and in that particular property of it, which consists in his drawing of his doctrine from the occasion; or, which is nearly the same thing, raising reflections from the objects and incidents before him, or turning a particular discourse then passing, into an opportunity of general instruction.

It will be my business to point out this *manner* in the first three evangelists; and then to inquire, whether it do not appear also, in several examples of Christ's discourses, preserved by Saint John.

The reader will observe in the following quotations, that the *Italic* letter contains the reflection; the common letter, the incident or occasion from which it springs.

Matt. xii. 47—50. 'Then they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren: *for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*'

Matt. xvi. 5. 'And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread; then Jesus said unto them, *Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees.*

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.—How is it that ye do not understand, that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees? Then understood they, *how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*"

Matt. xv. 1, 2. 10, 11. 15—20. 'Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.—And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear and understand: *Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*—Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do ye not yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth, goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? but those things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and they defile the man: *for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: BUT TO EAT WITH UNWASHEN HANDS DEFILETH NOT A MAN.*' Our Saviour, on this occasion, expatiates rather more at large than usual, and his discourse also is more divided: but the concluding sentence brings back the whole train of thought to the incident in the first verse, viz. the oburgatory question of the Pharisees, and renders it evident that the whole sprang from that circumstance.

Mark x. 13—15. 'And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them: but when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; *for of such is the kingdom of God: verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*'

Mark i. 16, 17. 'Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers: and Jesus said unto them, *Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.*'

Luke xi. 27. 'And it came to pass as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked: but he said, *Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.*'

Luke xiii. 1—3. 'There were present at that season, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices; and Jesus answering, said unto them, *Suppose ye, that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*'

Luke xiv. 15. 'And when one of them that sat at meat with him,

heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, *A certain man made a great supper, and bade many,* &c. The parable is rather too long for insertion, but affords a striking instance of Christ's manner of raising a discourse from the occasion. Observe also in the same chapter two other examples of advice, drawn from the circumstances of the entertainment and the behavior of the guests.

We will now see, how this manner discovers itself in *St. John's* history of Christ.

John vi. 25. 'And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them, and said, Verily I say unto you, ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. *Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.*'

John iv. 12. 'Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered, and said unto her (the woman of Samaria), Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but *whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.*'

John iv. 31. 'In the mean while, his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat; but he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, *My meat is, to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*'

John ix. 1—5. 'And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth; and his disciples asked him, saying, Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*'

John ix. 35—40. 'Jesus heard that they had cast him (the blind man above mentioned) out: and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? And he answered, and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe; and he worshipped him. And Jesus said, *For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see, might be made blind.*'

All that the reader has now to do, is to compare the series of examples taken from Saint John with the series of examples taken from the other evangelists, and to judge whether there be not a visible agreement in the manner between them. In the above-quoted passages, the occasion is stated, as well as the reflection. They seem, therefore, the most proper for the purpose of our argument. A large, however, and curious collection has been made

by different writers,\* of instances, in which it is extremely probable that Christ spoke in allusion to some object, or some occasion, then before him, though the mention of the occasion, or of the object, be omitted in the history. I only observe, that these instances are common to Saint John's Gospel with the other three.

I conclude this article by remarking, that nothing of this manner is perceptible in the speeches recorded in the Acts, or in any other but those which are attributed to Christ, and that, in truth, it was a very unlikely manner for a forger or fabulist to attempt; and a manner very difficult for any writer to execute, if he had to supply all the materials, both the incidents and the observations upon them, out of his own head. A forger or a fabulist would have made for Christ, discourses exhorting to virtue and dissuading from vice in general terms. It would never have entered into the thoughts of either, to have crowded together such a number of allusions to time, place, and other little circumstances, as occur, for instance, in the sermon on the mount, and which nothing but the actual presence of the objects could have suggested.†

II. There appears to me to exist an affinity between the history of Christ's placing a little child in the midst of his disciples, as related by the first three evangelists,‡ and the history of Christ's washing his disciples' feet, as given by Saint John.§ In the stories themselves there is no resemblance. But the affinity which I would point out consists in these two articles: First, that both stories denote the emulation which prevailed amongst Christ's disciples, and his own care and desire to correct it; the moral of both is the same. Secondly, that both stories are specimens of the same manner of teaching, viz. by action; a mode of emblematic instruction extremely peculiar, and, in these passages, ascribed, we see, to our Saviour, by the first three evangelists, and by Saint John, in instances totally unlike, and without the smallest suspicion of their borrowing from each other.

III. A singularity in Christ's language, which runs through all the evangelists, and which is found in those discourses of Saint John that have nothing similar to them in the other Gospels, is the appellation of 'the Son of man;' and it is in all the evangelists found under the peculiar circumstance of being applied by Christ to himself, but of never being used of him, or towards him, by any other person. It occurs seventeen times in Matthew's Gospel, twenty times in Mark's, twenty-one times in Luke's, and eleven times in John's, and always with this restriction.

IV. A point of agreement in the conduct of Christ, as represented by his different historians, is that of his withdrawing himself out of the way, whenever the behavior of the multitude indicated a disposition to tumult.

\* Newton on Daniel, p. 148. note a. Jortin, Dis. p. 213. Bishop Law's Life of Christ.

† See Bishop Law's Life of Christ.

‡ Matt. xviii. i. Mark ix, 33. Luke ix. 46.

§ Chap. xiii. 3.



Matt. xiv. 23. 'And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitude away. And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray.'

Luke v. 15, 16. 'But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him, and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities: and he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.'

With these quotations, compare the following from Saint John:

Chap. v. 13. 'And he that was healed wist not who it was; for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.'

Chap. vi. 15. 'When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.'

In this last instance, Saint John gives the motive of Christ's conduct, which is left unexplained by the other evangelists, who have related the conduct itself.

V. Another, and a more singular circumstance in Christ's ministry, was the reserve, which, for some time, and upon some occasions at least, he used in declaring his own character, and his leaving it to be collected from his works rather than his professions. Just reasons for this reserve have been assigned.\* But it is not what one would have expected. We meet with it in Saint Matthew's Gospel: chap. xvi. 20. 'Then charged he his disciples, that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.' Again, and upon a different occasion, in Saint Mark's: chap. iii. 11. 'And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God: and he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.' Another instance similar to this last is recorded by Saint Luke, chap. iv. 41. What we thus find in the three evangelists, appears also in a passage of Saint John, chap. x. 24, 25. 'Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.' The occasion here was different from any of the rest; and it was indirect. We only discover Christ's conduct through the upbraidings of his adversaries. But all this strengthens the argument. I had rather at any time surprise a coincidence in some oblique allusion, than read it in broad assertions.

VI. In our Lord's commerce with his disciples, one very observable particular is the difficulty which they found in understanding him, when he spoke to them of the future part of his history, especially of what related to his passion or resurrection. This difficulty produced, as was natural, a wish in them to ask for farther explanation; from which, however, they appear to have been sometimes kept back, by the fear of giving offence. All these circumstances are distinctly noticed by Mark and Luke upon the occasion of his informing them (probably for the first time), that the Son of man should be delivered into the hands of men. 'They understood not,'

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\* See Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity.

the evangelists tell us, 'this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.' Luke ix. 45. Mark ix. 32. In Saint John's Gospel we have, on a different occasion, and in a different instance, the same difficulty of apprehension, the same curiosity, and the same restraint:—'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me; because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us? A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, A little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them,' &c. John xvi. 16, &c.

VII. The meekness of Christ during his last sufferings, which is conspicuous in the narratives of the first three evangelists, is preserved in that of Saint John under separate examples. The answer given by him, in Saint John,\* when the high-priest asked him of his disciples and his doctrine; 'I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing; why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them;' is very much of a piece with his reply to the armed party which seized him, as we read in Saint Mark's Gospel, and in Saint Luke's:† 'Are you come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not.' In both answers, we discern the same tranquillity, the same reference to his public teaching. His mild expostulation with Pilate, on two several occasions, as related by Saint John,‡ is delivered with the same unruffled temper, as that which conducted him through the last scene of his life, as described by his other evangelists. His answer in Saint John's Gospel, to the officer who struck him with the palm of his hand, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?§ was such an answer, as might have been looked for from the person, who, as he proceeded to the place of execution, bid his companions (as we are told by Saint Luke)|| weep not for him, but for themselves, their posterity, and their country; and who, whilst he was suspended upon the cross, prayed for his murderers, 'for they know not,' said he, 'what they do.' The urgency also of his judges and his prosecutors to extort from him a defence to the accusation, and his unwillingness to make any (which was a peculiar circumstance), appears in Saint John's account, as well as in that of the other evangelists.¶

There are moreover two other correspondences between Saint John's history of the transaction and theirs, of a kind somewhat different from those which we have been now mentioning.

\* Chap. xviii. 20, 21.

† Mark xiv. 48. Luke xxii. 52.

‡ Chap. xviii. 34. xix. 11.

§ Chap. xviii. 23.

|| Chap. xxiii. 28.

¶ See John xix. 9. Matt. xxvii. 14. Luke xxiii. 9.

The first three evangelists record what is called our Saviour's agony, *i. e.* his devotion in the garden immediately before he was apprehended; in which narrative they all make him pray, 'that the cup might pass from him.' This is the particular metaphor which they all ascribe to him. Saint Matthew adds, 'O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.\*' Now Saint John does not give the scene in the garden: but when Jesus was seized, and some resistance was attempted to be made by Peter, Jesus, according to his account, checked the attempt with this reply: 'Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?†' This is something more than consistency; it is coincidence: because it is extremely natural, that Jesus, who, before he was apprehended, had been praying his Father, that 'that cup might pass from him,' yet with such a pious retraction of his request, as to have added, 'If this cup may not pass from me, thy will be done;‡' it was natural, I say, for the same person, when he actually was apprehended, to express the resignation to which he had already made up his thoughts, and to express it in the form of speech which he had before used, 'The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' This is a coincidence between writers, in whose narratives there is no imitation, but great diversity.

A second similar correspondency is the following: Matthew and Mark make a charge, upon which our Lord was condemned, to be a threat of destroying the temple; 'We heard him say, I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands:§ but they neither of them inform us, upon what circumstances this calumny was founded. Saint John, in the early part of the history,§ supplies us with this information; for he relates, that, on our Lord's first journey to Jerusalem, when the Jews asked him, 'What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? he answered, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' This agreement could hardly arise from any thing but the truth of the case. From any care or design in Saint John, to make his narrative tally with the narratives of other evangelists, it certainly did not arise, for no such design appears, but the absence of it.

A strong and more general instance of agreement is the following.—The first three evangelists have related the appointment of the twelve apostles,|| and have given a catalogue of their names in form. John, without ever mentioning the appointment, or giving the catalogue, supposes, throughout his whole narrative, Christ to be accompanied by a select party of his disciples; the number of those to be twelve;¶ and whenever he happens to notice any one of that number,\*\* it is one included in the catalogue of the other evangelists:

\* Chap. xxvi. 42.

§ Chap. ii. 19.

¶ Chap. vi. 70.

† Chap. xviii. 11.

|| Matt. x. 1. Mark iii. 14. Luke vi. 12.

\*\* Chap. xx. 24. vi. 71.

‡ Mark. xiv. 58.

and the names principally occurring in the course of *his* history of Christ, are the names extant in their list. This last agreement, which is of considerable moment, runs through every Gospel, and through every chapter of each.

All this bespeaks reality.

## CHAP. V.

### *Originality of our Saviour's Character.*

THE Jews, whether right or wrong, had understood their prophecies to foretell the advent of a person, who by some supernatural assistance should advance their nation to independence, and to a supreme degree of splendor and prosperity. This was the reigning opinion and expectation of the times.

Now, had Jesus been an enthusiast, it is probable that his enthusiasm would have fallen in with the popular delusion, and that, whilst he gave himself out to be the person intended by these predictions, he would have assumed the character to which they were universally supposed to relate.

Had he been an impostor, it was his business to have flattered the prevailing hopes, because these hopes were to be the instruments of his attraction and success.

But, what is better than conjecture, is the fact, that all the pretended Messiahs actually did so. We learn from Josephus, that there were many of these. Some of them, it is probable, might be impostors, who thought that an advantage was to be taken of the state of public opinion. Others, perhaps, were enthusiasts, whose imagination had been drawn to this particular object, by the language and sentiments which prevailed around them. But, whether impostors or enthusiasts, they concurred in producing themselves in the character which their countrymen looked for, that is to say, as the restorers and deliverers of the nation, in that sense in which restoration and deliverance were expected by the Jews.

Why therefore Jesus, if he was, like them, either an enthusiast or impostor, did not pursue the same conduct as they did, in framing his character and pretensions, it will be found difficult to explain. A mission, the operation and benefit of which was to take place in another life, was a thing unthought of as the subject of these prophecies. That Jesus, coming to them as their Messiah, should come under a character totally different from that in which they expected him; should deviate from the general persuasion, and deviate into pretensions absolutely singular and original; appears to be inconsistent with the imputation of enthusiasm or imposture, both which, by their nature, I should expect would, and both which, throughout the experience which this very subject furnishes, in fact *have* followed the opinions that obtained at the time.

If it be said, that Jesus, having tried the other plan, turned at

length to this ; I answer, that the thing is said without evidence ; against evidence ; that it was competent to the rest to have done the same, yet that nothing of this sort was thought of by any.

## CHAP. VI.

*Conformity of the facts occasionally mentioned or referred to in Scripture, with the state of things in those times as represented by foreign and independent accounts.*

ONE argument, which has been much relied upon (but not more than its just weight deserves), is the conformity of the facts occasionally mentioned or referred to in Scripture, with the state of things in those times, as represented by foreign and independent accounts ; which conformity proves, that the writers of the New Testament possessed a species of local knowledge, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, and to one living in that age. This argument, if well made out by examples, is very little short of proving the absolute genuineness of the writings. It carries them up to the age of the reputed authors, to an age in which it must have been difficult to impose upon the Christian public, forgeries in the names of those authors, and in which there is no evidence that any forgeries were attempted. It proves, at least, that the books, whoever were the authors of them, were composed by persons living in the time and country in which these things were transacted ; and consequently capable, by their situation, of being well informed of the facts which they relate. And the argument is stronger when applied to the New Testament, than it is in the case of almost any other writings, by reason of the mixed nature of the allusions which this book contains. The scene of action is not confined to a single country, but displayed in the greatest cities of the Roman empire. Allusions are made to the manners and principles of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews. This variety renders a forgery proportionably more difficult, especially to writers of a posterior age. A Greek or Roman Christian, who lived in the second or third century, would have been wanting in Jewish literature ; a Jewish convert in those ages would have been equally deficient in the knowledge of Greece and Rome.\*

This, however, is an argument which depends entirely upon an induction of particulars ; and as, consequently, it carries with it little force, without a view of the instances upon which it is built, I have to request the reader's attention to a detail of examples, distinctly and articulately proposed. In collecting these examples, I have done no more than epitomize the first volume of the first part of Dr. Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospel History*. And I have brought the argument within its present compass, first, by passing over some of

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\* Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament (Marsh's Translation), c. 2. sect. xi.

his sections in which the accordancy appeared to me less certain, or upon subjects not sufficiently appropriate or circumstantial; secondly, by contracting every section into the fewest words possible, contenting myself for the most part with a mere *apposition* of passages; and, thirdly, by omitting many disquisitions, which, though learned and accurate, are not absolutely necessary to the understanding or verification of the argument.

The writer principally made use of in the inquiry, is Josephus. Josephus was born at Jerusalem four years after Christ's ascension. He wrote his history of the Jewish war some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in the year of our Lord LXX, that is, thirty-seven years after the ascension; and his history of the Jews he finished in the year XCIII, that is, sixty years after the ascension.

At the head of each article, I have referred, by figures included in brackets, to the page of Dr. Lardner's volume, where the section, from which the abridgment is made, begins. The edition used, is that of 1741.

I. [p. 14.] Matt. ii. 22. 'When he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.'

In this passage it is asserted, that Archelaus succeeded Herod in Judea; and it is implied, that his power did *not* extend to Galilee. Now we learn from Josephus, that Herod the Great, whose dominion included all the land of Israel, appointed Archelaus his successor in *Judea*, and assigned the *rest* of his dominions to other sons; and that this disposition was ratified, as to the main parts of it, by the Roman emperor.\*

Saint Matthew says, that Archelaus *reigned*, was *king* in Judea. Agreeably to this, we are informed by Josephus, not only that Herod appointed Archelaus his successor in Judea, but that he also appointed him with the title of King; and the Greek verb βασιλευει, which the evangelist uses to denote the government and rank of Archelaus, is used likewise by Josephus.†

The cruelty of Archelaus's character, which is not obscurely intimated by the evangelist, agrees with divers particulars in his history, preserved by Josephus:—'In the tenth year of his government, the chief of the Jews and Samaritans, not being able to endure his cruelty and tyranny, presented complaints against him to Cæsar.†

II. [p. 19.] Luke iii. 1. 'In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar,—Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis,—the word of God came unto John.'

By the will of Herod the Great, and the decree of Augustus thereupon, his two sons were appointed, one (Herod Antipas) tetrarch of

\* Antiq. lib. xvii. c. 8. sect. 1.

† De Bell. lib. i. c. 33. sect. 7.

‡ Antiq. lib. xvii. c. 13. sect. 1.

Galilee and Peræa, and the other (Philip) tetrarch of Trachonitis and the neighboring countries.\* We have therefore these two persons in the situations in which Saint Luke places them; and also, that they were in these situations in the *fifteenth* year of Tiberius; in other words, that they continued in possession of their territories and titles until that time, and afterward, appears from a passage in Josephus, which relates of Herod, 'that he was *removed* by Caligula, the successor of Tiberius;† and of Philip, that he died in the *twentieth* year of Tiberius, when he had governed Trachonitis and Batanea and Gaulanitis thirty-seven years.‡

III. [p. 20.] Mark vi. 17. § 'Herod had sent forth, and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison, for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.'

With this compare Joseph. Antiq. l. xviii. 6. sect. 1.—'He (Herod the tetrarch) made a visit to Herod his brother.—Here, falling in love with Herodias, the wife of the said Herod, he ventured to make her proposals of marriage.¶

Again, Mark vi. 22. 'And when the *daughter of the said Herodias* came in and danced——.'

With this also compare Joseph. Antiq. l. xviii. c. 6. sect. 4. 'Herodias was married to Herod, son of Herod the Great. *They had a daughter*, whose name was Salome; after whose birth, Herodias, in utter violation of the laws of her country, left her husband, then living, and married Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, her husband's brother by the father's side.'

IV. [p. 29.] Acts xii. 1. 'Now, about that time, *Herod the king* stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.' In the conclusion of the same chapter, Herod's *death* is represented to have taken place soon after this persecution. The accuracy of our historian, or, rather, the unmeditated coincidence, which truth of its own accord produces, is in this instance remarkable. There was no portion of time, for thirty years before, nor *ever* afterward, in which there was a *king* at Jerusalem, a person exercising that authority in Judea, or to whom that title could be applied, except the three last years of this Herod's life, within which period the transaction re-

\* Ant. lib. xvii. c. 8. sect. 1.

† Ibid. lib. xviii. c. 8. sect. 2.

‡ Ibid. c. 5. sect. 6.

§ See also Matt. xiv. 1—13. Luke iii. 19.

¶ The affinity of the two accounts is unquestionable; but there is a difference in the name of Herodias's first husband, which, in the evangelist, is Philip; in Josephus, Herod. The difficulty, however, will not appear considerable, when we recollect how common it was in those times for the same person to bear two names. 'Simon, which is called Peter; Lebbeus, whose surname is Thaddeus; Thomas, which is called Didymus; Simeon, who was called Niger; Saul, who was also called Paul.' The solution is rendered likewise easier in the present case, by the consideration, that Herod the Great had children by seven or eight wives; that Josephus mentions three of his sons under the name of Herod: that it is nevertheless highly probable, that the brothers bore some additional name, by which they were distinguished from one another.—Lardner, vol. ii. p. 897.

corded in the Acts is stated to have taken place. This prince was the grandson of Herod the Great. In the Acts, he appears under his family-name of Herod; by Josephus he was called Agrippa. For proof that he was a *king*, properly so called, we have the testimony of Josephus in full and direct terms:—‘Sending for him to his palace, Caligula put a crown upon his head, and appointed him king of the tetrarchie of Philip, intending also to give him the tetrarchie of Lysanias.\*’ And that Judea was at last, but not until the last, included in his dominions, appears by a subsequent passage of the same Josephus, wherein he tells us, that Claudius, by a decree, confirmed to Agrippa the dominion which Caligula had given him; *adding also Judea and Samaria, in the utmost extent, as possessed by his grandfather Herod.*†

V. [p. 32.] Acts xii. 19—23. ‘And he (Herod) went down from Judea to Cesarea, and there abode.—And on a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them: and the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man; and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.’

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xix. c. 8. sect. 2. ‘He went to the city of Cesarea. Here he celebrated shows in honor of Caesar. On the second day of the shows, early in the morning, he came into the theatre, dressed in a robe of silver, of most curious workmanship. The rays of the rising sun, reflected from such a splendid garb, gave him a majestic and awful appearance. They called him a god; and entreated him to be propitious to them, saying, Hitherto we have respected you as a man; but now we acknowledge you to be more than mortal. The king neither reprovèd these persons, nor rejected the impious flattery.—Immediately after this, he was seized with pains in his bowels, extremely violent at the very first.—He was carried therefore with all haste to his palace. These pains continually tormenting him, he expired in five days’ time.’

The reader will perceive the accordancy of these accounts in various particulars. The place (Cesarea), the set day, the gorgeous dress, the acclamations of the assembly, the peculiar turn of the flattery, the reception of it, the sudden and critical incursion of the disease, are circumstances noticed in both narratives. The worms, mentioned by Saint Luke, are not remarked by Josephus; but the appearance of these is a symptom, not unusually, I believe, attending the diseases which Josephus describes, *viz.* violent affections of the bowels.

VI. [p. 41.] Acts xxiv. 24. ‘And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul.’

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xx. c. 6. sect. 1, 2. ‘Agrippa gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus, king of the Emesenes, when he had consented to be circumcised.—But this marriage of Drusilla with

\* Antiq. xviii. c. 7. sect. 10.

† Ib. xix. c. 5. sect. 1.



Azizus was dissolved in a short time after this manner:—When *Felix was procurator of Judea*, having had a sight of her, he was mightily taken with her.—She was induced to transgress the laws of her country, and marry Felix.’

Here the public station of Felix, the name of his wife, and the singular circumstance of her religion, all appear in perfect conformity with the evangelist.

VII. [p. 46.] ‘And after certain days, king Agrippa and Bernice came to Cesarea to salute Festus.’ By this passage we are in effect told, that Agrippa was a king, but not of Judea; for he came to salute Festus, who at this time administered the government of that country at Cesarea.

Now, how does the history of the age correspond with this account? The Agrippa here spoken of, was the son of Herod Agrippa, mentioned in the last article; but that he did not succeed to his father’s kingdom, nor ever recovered Judea, which had been a part of it, we learn by the information of Josephus, who relates of him that, when his father was dead, Claudius intended, at first, to have put him immediately in possession of his father’s dominions; but that, Agrippa being then but seventeen years of age, the emperor was persuaded to alter his mind, and appointed Cuspius Fadus prefect of Judea, and the whole kingdom;\* which Fadus was succeeded by Tiberius Alexander, Cumanus, Felix, Festus.† But that, though disappointed of his father’s kingdom, in which was included Judea, he was nevertheless rightly styled *King Agrippa*, and that he was in possession of considerable territories bordering upon Judea, we gather from the same authority; for, after several successive donations of country, ‘Claudius, at the same time that he sent Felix to be procurator of Judea, promoted Agrippa from Chalcis to a greater *kingdom*, giving to him the tetrarchie which had been Philip’s; and he added moreover the *kingdom* of Lysanias, and the province that had belonged to Varus.’‡

Saint Paul addresses this person as a Jew: ‘King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.’ As the son of Herod Agrippa, who is described by Josephus to have been a zealous Jew, it is reasonable to suppose that he maintained the same profession. But what is more material to remark, because it is more close and circumstantial, is, that Saint Luke, speaking of the father, (Acts xii. 1—3.) calls him Herod the king, and gives an example of the exercise of his authority at Jerusalem: speaking of the son, (xxv. 13.) he calls him king, but not of Judea; which distinction agrees correctly with the history.

VIII. [p. 51.] Acts xiii. 6. ‘And when they had gone through the isle (Cyprus) to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus, which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man.’

\* Antiq. xix. c. 9. ad fin.

† Ib. xx. De Bell. lib. ii.

‡ De Bell. lib. ii. c. 12. ad fin.

The word, which is here translated deputy, signifies *proconsul*, and upon this word our observation is founded. The provinces of the Roman empire were of two kinds; those belonging to the emperor, in which the governor was called *propretor*; and those belonging to the senate, in which the governor was called *proconsul*. And this was a regular distinction. Now it appears from Dio Cassius,\* that the province of Cyprus, which in the original distribution was assigned to the emperor, had been transferred to the senate, in exchange for some others; and that, after this exchange, the appropriate title of the Roman governor was *proconsul*.

Ib. xviii. 12. [p. 55.] 'And when Gallio was deputy (*proconsul*) of Achaia.'

The propriety of the title '*proconsul*,' is in this passage still more critical. For the province of Achaia, after passing from the senate to the emperor, had been restored again by the emperor Claudius to the senate (and consequently its government had become *proconsular*) only six or seven years before the time in which this transaction is said to have taken place.† And what confines with strictness the appellation to the time is, that Achaia under the following reign ceased to be a Roman province at all.

IX. [p. 152.] It appears, as well from the general constitution of a Roman province, as from what Josephus delivers concerning the state of Judea in particular,‡ that the power of life and death resided exclusively in the Roman governor; but that the Jews, nevertheless, had magistrates and a council, invested with a subordinate and municipal authority. This economy is discerned in every part of the Gospel narrative of our Saviour's crucifixion.

X. [p. 203.] Acts ix. 31. 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria.'

This rest synchronizes with the attempt of Caligula to place his statue in the temple of Jerusalem; the threat of which outrage produced amongst the Jews a consternation that, for a season, diverted their attention from every other object.§

XI. [p. 218.] Acts xxi. 30. 'And they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple; and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Then the chief captain came near, and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and demanded, who he was, and what he had done; and some cried one thing, and some another, among the multitude: and, when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.'

In this quotation, we have the band of Roman soldiers at Jerusalem, their office (to suppress tumults), the castle, the stairs,

\* De Bell. lib. liv. ad. A. U. 732.

† Suet. in Claud. c. 25. Dio, lib. lxi.

‡ Antiq. lib. xx. c. 8. sect. 5. c. 1. sect. 2.

§ Joseph. de Bell. lib. xi. c. 13. sect. 1. 3, 4.

both, as it should seem, adjoining to the temple. Let us inquire whether we can find these particulars in any other record of that age and place.

Joseph. de Bell. lib. v. c. 5. sect. 8. 'Antonia was situated at the angle of the western and northern porticoes of the outer temple. It was built upon a rock fifty cubits high, steep on all sides.—On that side where it joined to the porticoes of the temple, there were *stairs* reaching to each portico, by which the *guard* descended; for there was always lodged here a *Roman legion*, and posting themselves in their armor in several places in the porticoes, they kept a watch on the people on the feast-days to prevent all disorders; for as the temple was a guard to the city, so was Antonia to the temple.'

XII. [p. 224.] Acts iv. 1. 'And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees, came upon them.' Here we have a public officer, under the title of captain of the temple, and he probably a Jew, as he accompanied the priests and Sadducees in apprehending the apostles.

Joseph. de Bell. lib. ii. c. 17. sect. 2. 'And at the temple, Eleazar, the son of Ananias, the high-priest, a young man of a bold and resolute disposition, then captain, persuaded those who performed the sacred ministrations not to receive the gift or sacrifice from any stranger.'

XIII. [p. 225.] Acts xxv. 12. 'Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.' That it was usual for the Roman presidents to have a council, consisting of their friends, and other chief Romans in the province, appears expressly in the following passage of Cicero's oration against Verres:—'Illud negare posses, aut nunc negabis, te, concilio tuo dimisso, viris primariis, qui in consilio C. Sacerdotis fuerant, tibi que esse volebant, remotis, de re judicatâ judicâsse?'

XIV. [p. 235.] Acts xvi. 13. 'And (at Philippi) on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river-side, where prayer was wont to be made,' or where a *προσευχη*, oratory, or place of prayer, was allowed. The particularity to be remarked, is the situation of the place where prayer was wont to be made, viz. by a river-side.

Philo, describing the conduct of the Jews of Alexandria, on a certain public occasion, relates of them, that 'early in the morning, flocking out of the gates of the city, they go to the neighboring shores (for the *προσευχαί* were destroyed), and, standing in a most pure place, they lift up their voices with one accord.'

Josephus gives us a decree of the city of Halicarnassus, permitting the Jews to build oratories; a part of which decree runs thus:—'We ordain that the Jews who are willing, men and women, do observe the sabbaths, and perform sacred rites according to the Jewish laws, and build oratories by the sea-side.'

Tertullian, among other Jewish rites and customs, such as feasts,

\* Philo in Flacc. p. 382.

† Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiv. c. 10. sect. 24.

sabbaths, fasts, and unleavened bread, mentions '*orationes litorales*;' that is, prayers by the river-side.\*

XV. [p. 255.] Acts xxvi. 5. 'After the most *straitest* sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.'

Joseph. de Bell. lib. i. c. 5. sect. 2. 'The Pharisees were reckoned the most religious of any of the Jews, and to be the most *exact* and skilful in explaining the laws.'

In the original, there is an agreement not only in the sense, but in the expression, it being the same Greek adjective, which is rendered '*strait*' in the Acts, and '*exact*' in Josephus.

XVI. [p. 255.] Mark vii. 3, 4. 'The Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders; and many other things there be which they have received to hold.'

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiii. c. 10. sect. 6. 'The Pharisees have delivered to the people many institutions, as received from the fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses.'

XVII. [p. 259.] Acts xxiii. 8. 'For the Sadducees say, that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.'

Joseph. de Bell. lib. c. 8. sect. 14. 'They (the Pharisees) believe every soul to be immortal, but that the soul of the good only passes into another body, and that the soul of the wicked is punished with eternal punishment.' On the other hand, (Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 1. sect. 4.) 'It is the opinion of the Sadducees, that souls perish with the bodies.'

XVIII. [p. 268.] Acts v. 17. 'Then the high-priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation.' Saint Luke here intimates, that the high-priest was a Sadducee; which is a character one would not have expected to meet with in that station. The circumstance, remarkable as it is, was not however without examples.

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiii. c. 10. sect. 6, 7. 'John Hyrcanus, high-priest of the Jews, forsook the Pharisees upon a disgust, and joined himself to the party of the Sadducees.' This high-priest died one hundred and seven years before the Christian era.

Again, (Antiq. lib. xx. c. 8. sect. 1.) 'This Ananus the younger, who, as we have said just now, had received the high-priesthood, was fierce and haughty in his behavior, and, above all men, bold and daring, and, moreover, *was of the sect of the Sadducees*.' This high-priest lived little more than twenty-years after the transaction in the Acts.

XIX. [p. 282.] Luke ix. 51. 'And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.'

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xx. c. 5. sect. 1. 'It was the custom of the

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\* Tertull. ad Nat. lib. i. c. 13.

Galileans, who went up to the holy city at the feasts, to travel through the country of Samaria. As they were in their journey, some inhabitants of the village called *Ginæa*, which lies on the borders of Samaria and the great plain, falling upon them, killed a great many of them.'

XX. [p. 278.] John iv. 20. 'Our fathers,' said the Samaritan woman, 'worshipped in *this mountain*; and ye say, that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.'

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 5. sect. 1. 'Commanding them to meet him at *mount Gerizim*, which is by them (the Samaritans) esteemed the most sacred of all mountains.'

XXI. [p. 812.] Matt. xxvi. 3. 'Then assembled together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high-priest, *who was called Caiaphas*.' That Caiaphas was high-priest, and high-priest throughout the presidentship of Pontius Pilate, and consequently at this time, appears from the following account:—He was made high-priest by Valerius Gratus, *predecessor* of Pontius Pilate, and was removed from his office by Vitellius, president of Syria, *after* Pilate was sent away out of the province of Judea. Josephus relates the *advancement* of Caiaphas to the high-priesthood in this manner: 'Gratus gave the high-priesthood to Simon, the son of Camithus. He having enjoyed this honor not above a year, was succeeded by Joseph, *who is also called Caiaphas*.\* After this, Gratus went away for Rome, having been eleven years in Judea; and *Pontius Pilate came thither as his successor*.' Of the *removal* of Caiaphas from his office, Josephus, likewise, afterward informs us; and connects it with a circumstance which fixes the time to a date subsequent to the determination of Pilate's government—'Vitellius,' he tells us, 'ordered *Pilate to repair to Rome*; and *after that*, went up himself to Jerusalem, and then gave directions concerning several matters. And having done these things, he took away the priesthood from *the high-priest Joseph*, who is called *Caiaphas*.'†

XXII. (Michaelis. c. xi. sect. 11.) Acts xxiii. 4. 'And they that stood by, said, Revilest thou God's high-priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high-priest.' Now, upon inquiry into the history of the age, it turns out, that Ananias, of whom this is spoken, was, in truth, *not* the high-priest, though he was sitting in judgment in that assumed capacity. The case was, that he had formerly holden the office, and had been deposed; that the person who succeeded him had been murdered; that another was not yet appointed to the station; and that, during the vacancy, he had, of his own authority, taken upon himself the discharge of the office.‡ This singular situation of the high-priesthood took place during the interval between the death of Jonathan, who was murdered by

\* Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 2. sect. 2.

† Ibid. l. xvii. c. 5. sect. 3.

‡ Ibid. l. xx. c. 5. sect. 2; c. 9. sect. 2.

order of Felix, and the accession of Ismael who was invested with the high-priesthood by Agrippa; and precisely in this interval it happened that Saint Paul was apprehended, and brought before the Jewish council.

XXIII. [p. 323.] Matt. xxvi. 59. 'Now the *chief priests* and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against him.'

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 15. sect. 3, 4. 'Then might be seen the *high-priests themselves*, with ashes on their heads, and their breasts naked.'

The agreement here consists in speaking of the high-priests or chief priests (for the name in the original is the same) in the *plural number*, when, in strictness, there was only *one* high-priest: which may be considered as a proof, that the evangelists were habituated to the manner of speaking then in use, because they retain it when it is neither accurate nor just. For the sake of brevity, I have put down, from Josephus, only a single example of the application of this title in the plural number; but it is his usual style.

Ib. [p. 871.] Luke iii. 1. 'Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, *Annas and Caiaphas being the high-priests*, the word of God came unto John.' There is a passage in Josephus very nearly parallel to this, and which may at least serve to vindicate the evangelists from objection, with respect to his giving the title of high-priest specifically to two persons at the same time: 'Quadratus sent two others of the most powerful men of the Jews, as also the *high-priests Jonathan and Ananias*.\*' That Annas was a person in an eminent station, and possessed an authority co-ordinate with, or next to, that of the high-priest properly so called, may be inferred from Saint John's Gospel, which, in the history of Christ's crucifixion, relates that 'the soldiers led him away to Annas first.†' And this might be noticed as an example of undesigned coincidence in the two evangelists.

Again, [p. 870.] Acts iv. 6. Annas is called the high-priest, though Caiaphas was in the office of the high-priesthood. In like manner, in Josephus,‡ Joseph the son of Gorion, and the high-priest Ananus, were chosen to be supreme governors of all things in the city. Yet Ananus, though here called the high-priest Ananus, was not then in the office of the high priesthood. The truth is, there is an indeterminateness in the use of this title in the Gospel: sometimes it is applied exclusively to the person who held the office at the time; sometimes to one or two more, who probably shared with him some of the powers or functions of the office; and, sometimes, to such of the priests as were eminent by their station or character;§ and there is the very same indeterminateness in Josephus.

XXIV. [p. 347.] John xix. 19, 20. 'And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. That such was the custom of the Romans on these occasions, appears from passages of Suetonius and Dio Cas-

\* De Bell. lib. ix. c. 12. sect. 6.

† Lib. ii. c. 20. sect. 3.

‡ xviii. 13.

§ Mark xiv. 53.

sus: 'Patrem familias—canibus objecit, cum hoc *titulo*, Impiè locutus parmularius.' Suct. Domit. cap. x. And in Dio Cassius we have the following: 'Having led him through the midst of the court or assembly, *with a writing signifying the cause of his death*, and afterward crucifying him.' Book liv.

Ib. 'And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.' That it was also usual about this time, in Jerusalem, to set up advertisements in *different* languages, is gathered from the account which Josephus gives of an expostulatory message from Titus to the Jews, when the city was almost in his hands; in which he says, Did ye not erect pillars with inscriptions on them, *in the Greek and in our language*, 'Let no one pass beyond these bounds.'

XXV. [p. 352.] Matt. xxvii. 26. 'When he had *scourged* Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.'

The following passages occur in Josephus:

'Being *beaten*, they were crucified opposite to the citadel.\*

'Whom, having *first scourged with whips*, he crucified.†

'He was burnt alive, *having been first beaten*.‡

To which may be added one from Livy, lib. xi. c. 5. 'Productique omnes, *virgisque cæsi*, ac securi percussi.'

A modern example may illustrate the use we make of this instance. The preceding, of a capital execution by the corporal punishment of the sufferer, is a practice unknown in England, but retained, in some instances at least, as appears by the late execution of a regicide, in Sweden. This circumstance, therefore, in the account of an English execution, purporting to come from an English writer, would not only bring a suspicion upon the truth of the account, but would, in a considerable degree, impeach its pretensions of having been written by the author whose name it bore. Whereas the same circumstance, in the account of a Swedish execution, would verify the account, and support the authenticity of the book in which it was found; or, at least, would prove that the author, whoever he was, possessed the information and the knowledge which he ought to possess.

XXVI. [p. 353.] John xix. 16. 'And they took Jesus, and led him away; and he, *bearing his cross*, went forth.'

Plutarch, De iis qui serò puniuntur. p. 554: à Paris, 1624. 'Every kind of wickedness produces its own particular torment, just as every malefactor, when he is brought forth to execution *carries his own cross*.'

XXVII. John xix. 32. 'Then came the soldiers, and *brake the legs* of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.'

Constantine abolished the punishment of the cross; in commending which edict, a heathen writer notices this very circumstance of *breaking the legs*: 'Eò pius, ut etiam vetus veterrimumque supplicium, patibulum, et *cruribus suffringendis*, primus removerit.' Aur. Vict. Ces. cap. xli.

\* P. 1247, edit. 24. Huds.

† P. 1327, edit. 43.

‡ P. 1080, edit. 45.

XXVIII. [p. 457.] Acts iii. 1. 'Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, being the *ninth* hour.'

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xv. c. 7. sect. 8. 'Twice every day, in the morning and at the *ninth* hour, the priests perform their duty at the altar.'

XXIX. [p. 462.] Acts xv. 21. 'For Moses, of old time, hath, in every city, them that preach him, *being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day.*'

Joseph. contra Ap. l. ii. 'He (Moses) gave us the law; the most excellent of all institutions; nor did he appoint that it should be heard once only, or twice, or often, but that laying aside all other works, we should meet together *every week* to hear it read, and gain a perfect understanding of it.'

XXX. [p. 465.] Acts xxi. 23. 'We have four men, which have a *vow* on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, that they may *shave their heads.*'

Joseph. de Bell. l. xi. c. 15. 'It is customary for those who have been afflicted with some distemper, or have labored under any other difficulties, to make a *vow* thirty days before they offer sacrifices, to abstain from wine, and *shave the hair of their heads.*'

Ib. v. 24. 'Them take, and purify thyself with them, and *be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads.*'

Joseph. Antiq. l. xix. c. 6. 'He (Herod Agrippa) coming to Jerusalem, offered up sacrifices of thanksgiving, and omitted nothing that was prescribed by the law. For which reason *he also ordered a good number of Nazarites to be shaved.*' We here find that it was an act of piety amongst the Jews, to defray for those who were under the Nazarite vow the expenses which attended its completion; and that the phrase was, 'that they might be shaved.' The custom and the expression are both remarkable, and both in close conformity with the Scripture account.

XXXI. [p. 474.] 2 Cor. xi. 24. 'Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes, *save one.*'

Joseph. Antiq. iv. c. 8. sect. 21. 'He that acts contrary hereto, let him receive forty stripes, *wanting one*, from the public officer.'

The coincidence here is singular, because the law *allowed* forty stripes:—'Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed.' Deut. xxv. 3. It proves that the author of the Epistle to the Corinthians was guided, not by books, but by facts; because his statement agrees with the actual custom, even when that custom deviated from the written law, and from what he must have learnt by consulting the Jewish code, as set forth in the Old Testament.

XXXII. [p. 490.] Luke iii. 12. 'Then came also *publicans* to be baptized.' From this quotation, as well as from the history of Levi or Matthew (Luke v. 29.) and of Zaccheus, (Luke xix. 2.) it appears, that the publicans or tax-gatherers were, frequently, at least, if not always, Jews: which, as the country was then under a Roman government, and the taxes were paid to the Romans, was a circumstance not to be expected. That it was the truth however of the case, appears, from a short passage of Josephus.

De Bell. lib. ii. c. 14. sect. 45. 'But, Florus not restraining these



practices by his authority, the chief men of the Jews, *among whom was John the publican*, not knowing well what course to take, wait upon Florus, and give him eight talents of silver to stop the building.'

XXXIII. [p. 496.] Acts xxii. 25. 'And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?'

'Facinus est vinciri civem Romanum; scelus verberari.' Cic. in Verr.

'Cædebatur virgis, in medio foro Messanæ, civis Romanus, Judices: cùm intereà nullus gemitus, nulla vox alia, istius miseri inter dolorem crepitumque plagarum audiebatur, nisi hæc, *Civis Romanus sum.*'

XXXIV. [p. 513.] Acts xxii. 27. 'Then the chief captain came, and said unto him (Paul), Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.' The circumstance here to be noticed is, that a *Jew* was a Roman citizen.

Joseph. Antiq. lib. xiv. c. 10. sect. 13. 'Lucius Lentulus, the consul, declared, I have dismissed from the service *the Jewish Roman citizens*, who observe the rites of the Jewish religion at Ephesus.'

Ib. v. 28. 'And the chief captain answered, *With a great sum obtained I this freedom.*'

Dio Cassius, lib. lx. 'This privilege, which had been *bought formerly at a great price*, became so cheap, that it was commonly said, a man might be made a Roman citizen for a few pieces of broken glass.'

XXXV. [p. 521.] Acts xxviii. 16. 'And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with *a soldier that kept him.*'

With which join ver. 20. 'For the hope of Israel, I am bound with *this chain.*'

'Quemadmodum eadem *catena* et custodiam et *militem* copulat; sic ista, quæ tam dissimilia sunt, pariter incedunt.' Seneca, Ep. v.

'Proconsul æstimare solet, utrum in carcerem recipienda sit persona, an *militi tradenda.*' Ulpian, l. i. sect. De Custod. et Exhib. Reor.

In the confinement of Agrippa by the order of Tiberius, Antonia managed, that the centurion who presided over the guards, and the *soldier to whom Agrippa was to be bound*, might be men of mild character. (Joseph. Antiq. lib. xviii. c. 7. sect. 5.) After the accession of Caligula, Agrippa also, like Paul, was suffered to dwell, yet as a prisoner, in his own house.

XXXVI. [p. 531.] Acts xxvii. 1. 'And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul, *and certain other prisoners*, unto one named Julius.' Since not only Paul but certain other *prisoners* were sent by the same ship into Italy, the text must be considered as carrying with it an intimation, that the sending of persons from Judea to be tried at Rome, was an ordinary practice. That in truth it was so, is made out by a variety of examples which the writings of Josephus furnish; and, amongst others, by the fol-

lowing, which comes near both to the time and the subject of the instance in the Acts. 'Felix, for some slight offence, *bound and sent to Rome* several priests of his acquaintance, and very good and honest men, to answer for themselves to Cæsar.' Joseph. in Vit. sect. 3.

XXXVII. [p. 539.] Acts xi. 27. 'And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world (or all the country); *which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.*'

Joseph. Antiq. l. xx. c. 4. sect. 2. 'In their time (i. e. about the fifth or sixth year of Claudius) a great dearth happened in Judea.'

XXXVIII. [p. 555.] Acts xviii. 1, 2. 'Because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome.'

Suet. Claud. c. xxv. 'Judæos, impulsore Chresto assiduè tumultuantes, Româ expulit.'

XXXIX. [p. 664.] Acts v. 37. 'After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him.'

Joseph. de Bell. l. vii. 'He (*viz.* the person who in another place is called, by Josephus, Judas the Galilean or Judas of Galilee) persuaded not a few not to enrol themselves, when Cyrenius the Censor was sent into Judea.'

XL. [p. 942.] Acts xxi. 38. 'Art not thou that Egyptian which, before these days, madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?'

Joseph. de Bell. l. ii. c. 13. sect. 5. 'But the Egyptian false prophet brought a yet heavier disaster upon the Jews; for this impostor, coming into the country, and gaining the reputation of a prophet, gathered together thirty thousand men, who were deceived by him. Having brought them round out of the wilderness, up to the mount of Olives, he intended from thence to make his attack upon Jerusalem; but Felix, coming suddenly upon him with the Roman soldiers, prevented the attack.'—A great number, (or as it should rather be rendered) the greatest part of those that were with him, were either slain or taken prisoners.

In these two passages, the designation of this impostor, an 'Egyptian,' without the proper name; 'the wilderness;' his escape, though his followers were destroyed; the time of the transaction, in the presidentship of Felix, which could not be any long time before the words in Luke are supposed to have been spoken; are circumstances of close correspondency. There is one, and only one, point of disagreement, and that is, in the number of his followers, which in the Acts are called four thousand, and by Josephus thirty thousand: but, beside that the names of numbers, more than any other words, are liable to the errors of transcribers, we are, in the present instance, under the less concern to reconcile the evangelist with Josephus, as Josephus is not, in this point, consistent with himself. For whereas, in the passages here quoted, he calls the number thirty thousand, and tells us that the greatest part, or a great num-

ber (according as his words are rendered), of those that were with him, were destroyed; in his *Antiquities*, he represents four hundred to have been killed upon this occasion, and two hundred taken prisoners:\* which certainly was not the 'greatest part,' nor 'a great part,' nor 'a great number,' out of thirty thousand. It is probable also, that Lysias and Josephus spoke of the expedition in its different stages: Lysias, of those who followed the Egyptian out of Jerusalem: Josephus, of all who were collected about him afterward, from different quarters.

XLI. (Lardner's *Jewish and Heathen Testimonies*, vol. iii. p. 21.) Acts xvii. 22. 'Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious; for as I passed by and beheld your devotions, *I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.* Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.'

*Diogenes Laërtius*, who wrote about the year 210, in the history of Epimenides, who is supposed to have flourished nearly six hundred years before Christ, relates of him the following story: that, being invited to Athens for the purpose, he delivered the city from a pestilence in this manner;—'Taking several sheep, some black, others white, he had them up to the Areopagus, and then let them go where they would, and gave orders to those who followed them, wherever any of them should lie down, to sacrifice it to the god to whom it belonged; and so the plague ceased.—Hence,' says the historian, it has come to pass, *that to this present time, may be found in the boroughs of the Athenians ANONYMOUS altars*: a memorial of the expiation then made.† These altars, it may be presumed, were called *anonymous*, because there was not the name of any particular deity inscribed upon them.

*Pausanias*, who wrote before the end of the second century, in his description of Athens, having mentioned an altar of Jupiter Olympius, adds, '*And nigh unto it is an altar of unknown gods.*'‡ And in another place he speaks '*of altars of gods called unknown.*'§

*Philostratus*, who wrote in the beginning of the third century, records it as an observation of Apollonius Tyanæus, 'That it was wise to speak well of all the gods, *especially at Athens, where altars of unknown demons were erected.*'||

The author of the *dialogue Philopatris*, by many supposed to have been Lucian, who wrote about the year 170, by others some anonymous Heathen writer of the fourth century, makes Critias swear *by the unknown god of Athens*; and, near the end of the dialogue, has these words, 'But let us find out the unknown god of Athens, and, stretching our hands to heaven, offer to him our praises and thanksgivings.'¶

This is a very curious and a very important coincidence. It ap-

\* Lib. 20. c. 7. sect. 6.

† In Epimenide, l. i. segm. 110.

‡ Paus. l. v. p. 412.

§ Paus. l. i. p. 4.

|| Philos. Apoll. Tyan. l. vi. c. 3.

¶ Lucian. in *Philop.* tom. ii. Græv. p. 767. 780.

pears beyond controversy, that altars with this inscription were existing at Athens, at the time when Saint Paul is alleged to have been there. It seems also (which is very worthy of observation), that this inscription was *peculiar* to the Athenians. There is no evidence that there were altars inscribed 'to the unknown god' in any other country. Supposing the history of Saint Paul to have been a fable, how is it possible that such a writer as the author of the Acts of the Apostles was, should hit upon a circumstance so extraordinary, and introduce it by an allusion so suitable to Saint Paul's office and character?

THE examples here collected will be sufficient, I hope, to satisfy us, that the writers of the Christian history knew something of what they were writing about. The argument is also strengthened by the following considerations:—

I. That these agreements appear, not only in articles of public history, but sometimes, in minute, recondite, and very peculiar circumstances, in which, of all others, a forger is most likely to have been found tripping.

II. That the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place forty years after the commencement of the Christian institution, produced such a change in the state of the country, and the condition of the Jews, that a writer who was unacquainted with the circumstances of the nation *before* that event, would find it difficult to avoid mistakes, in endeavoring to give detailed accounts of transactions connected with those circumstances, forasmuch as he could no longer have a living exemplar to copy from.

III. That there appears, in the writers of the New Testament, a knowledge of the affairs of those times, which we do not find in authors of later ages. In particular, 'many of the Christian writers of the second and third centuries, and of the following ages, had false notions concerning the state of Judea, between the nativity of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem.\*' Therefore *they* could not have composed our histories.

Amidst so many conformities, we are not to wonder that we meet with some difficulties. The principal of these I will put down, together with the solutions which they have received. But in doing this, I must be contented with a brevity better suited to the limits of my volume than to the nature of a controversial argument. For the historical proofs of my assertions, and for the Greek criticisms upon which some of them are founded, I refer the reader to the second volume of the first part of Dr. Lardner's large work.

I. The taxing during which Jesus was born, was 'first made,' as we read, according to our translation, in Saint Luke, 'whilst Cyrenius was governor of Syria.†' Now it turns out that Cyrenius was not governor of Syria until twelve, or, at the soonest, ten years after the birth of Christ; and that a taxing, census, or assessment, was

\* Lardner, part i. vol. ii. p. 960.

† Chap. ii. ver. 2.

made in Judea in the beginning of his government. The charge, therefore, brought against the evangelist is, that, intending to refer to this taxing, he has misplaced the date of it by an error of ten or twelve years.

The answer to the accusation is found in his using the word 'first:—'And this taxing was *first* made:' for according to the mistake imputed to the evangelist, this word could have no significance whatever; it could have had no place in his narrative: because, let it relate to what it will, taxing, census, enrolment, or assessment, it imports that the writer had more than one of those in contemplation. It acquits him therefore of the charge: it is inconsistent with the supposition of his knowing only of the taxing in the beginning of Cyrenius's government. And if the evangelist knew (which this word proves that he did) of some other taxing beside that, it is too much, for the sake of convicting him of a mistake, to lay it down as certain that he intended to refer to *that*.

The sentence in Saint Luke may be construed thus: 'This was the first assessment (or enrolment) of Cyrenius, governor of Syria;\* the words 'governor of Syria' being used after the name of Cyrenius as his addition or title. And this title belonging to him at the time of writing the account, was naturally enough subjoined to his name, though acquired after the transaction which the account describes. A modern writer, who was not very exact in the choice of his expressions, in relating the affairs of the East Indies, might easily say, that such a thing was done by *Governor* Hastings; though, in truth, the thing had been done by him before his advancement to the station from which he received the name of governor. And this, as we contend, is precisely the inaccuracy which has produced the difficulty in Saint Luke.

At any rate, it appears from the form of the expression, that he had two taxings or enrolments in contemplation. And if Cyrenius had been sent upon this business into Judea, before he became governor of Syria (against which supposition there is no proof, but rather external evidence of an enrolment going on about this time under some person or other),† then the census, on all hands acknowledged to have been made by him in the beginning of his government,

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\* If the word which we render 'first,' be rendered 'before,' which it has been strongly contended that the Greek idiom allows of, the whole difficulty vanishes: for then the passage would be,—'Now this taxing was made before Cyrenius was governor of Syria;' which corresponds with the chronology. But I rather choose to argue, that however the word 'first' be rendered, to give it a meaning at all, it militates with the objection. In this I think there can be no mistake.

† Josephus (Antiq. xvii. c. 2. sect. 6.) has this remarkable passage: 'When therefore the whole Jewish nation took an oath to be faithful to Cæsar, and the interests of the king.' This transaction corresponds in the course of the history with the time of Christ's birth. What is called a census, and which we render taxing, was delivering upon oath an account of their property. This might be accompanied with an oath of fidelity, or might be mistaken by Josephus for it.

would form a second, so as to occasion the other to be called the *first*.

II. Another chronological objection arises upon a date assigned in the beginning of the third chapter of Saint Luke.\* 'Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar,'—Jesus *began to be about thirty years of age*: for, supposing Jesus to have been born, as Saint Matthew, and Saint Luke also himself, relate, in the time of Herod, he must, according to the dates given in Josephus and by the Roman historians, have been at least thirty-one years of age in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. If he was born, as Saint Matthew's narrative intimates, one or two years before Herod's death, he would have been thirty-two or thirty-three years old at that time.

This is the difficulty: the solution turns upon an alteration in the construction of the Greek. Saint Luke's words in the original are allowed, by the general opinion of learned men, to signify, not 'that Jesus began to be about thirty years of age,' but 'that he was about thirty years of age when he began his ministry.' This construction being admitted, the adverb 'about' gives us all the latitude we want, and more, especially when applied, as it is in the present instance, to a decimal number: for such numbers, even without this qualifying addition, are often used in a laxer sense than is here contended for.†

III. Acts v. 36. 'For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to naught.'

Josephus has preserved the account of an impostor of the name of Theudas, who created some disturbances, and was slain; but according to the date assigned to this man's appearance (in which, however, it is very possible that Josephus may have been mistaken), it must have been, at the least, seven years after Gamaliel's speech, of which this text is a part, was delivered. It has been replied to the objection,‡ that there might be two impostors of this name: and it has been observed, in order to give a general probability to the solution, that the same thing appears to have happened in other instances of the same kind. It is proved from Josephus, that there were not fewer than four persons of the name of Simon within forty years, and not fewer than three of the name of Judas within ten

\* Lardner, part i. vol. ii. p. 768.

† Livy, speaking of the peace which the conduct of Romulus had procured to the state, during the *whole* reign of his successor (Numa), has these words:—'Ab illo enim profectis viribus datis tantum valuit, ut, in *quadraginta* deinde annos, tutam pacem haberet:' yet afterward, in the same chapter, 'Romulus (he says) septem et triginta regnavit annos. Numa tres et quadraginta.'

‡ Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament (Marsh's Translation), vol. i. p. 61.

§ Lardner, part i. vol. ii. p. 922.

years, who were all leaders of insurrections: and it is likewise recorded by the historian, that, upon the death of Herod the Great (which agrees very well with the time of the commotion referred to by Gamaliel, and with his manner of stating that time, 'before these days'), there were innumerable disturbances in Judea.\* Archbishop Usher was of opinion, that one of the three Judases above mentioned was Gamaliel's Theudas;† and that with a less variation of the name than we actually find in the Gospels, where one of the twelve apostles is called, by Luke, Judas; and by Mark, Thaddeus.‡ Orogen, however he came at his information, appears to have believed that there was an impostor of the name of Theudas before the nativity of Christ.§

IV. Matt. xxiii. 34. 'Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.'

There is a Zacharias, whose death is related in the second book of Chronicles,|| in a manner which perfectly supports our Saviour's allusion. But this Zacharias was the son of Jehoiada.

There is also Zacharias the prophet; who was the son of Barachiah, and is so described in the superscription of his prophecy, but of whose death we have no account.

I have little doubt, but that the first Zacharias was the person spoken of by our Saviour; and that the name of the father has been since added, or changed, by some one, who took it from the title of the prophecy, which happened to be better known to him than the history in the Chronicles.

There is likewise a Zacharias, the son of Baruch, related by Josephus to have been slain in the temple a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem. It has been insinuated, that the words put into our Saviour's mouth contain a reference to this transaction, and were composed by some writer, who either confounded the time of the transaction with our Saviour's age, or inadvertently overlooked the anachronism.

Now suppose it to have been so; suppose these words to have been suggested by the transaction related in Josephus, and to have been falsely ascribed to Christ; and observe what extraordinary

\* Antiq. l. xvii. c. 12. sect. 4.

† Luke vi. 16. Mark iii. 18.

‡ Annals, p. 797.

§ Orig. cont. Cels. p. 44.

|| And the Spirit of God came upon Zecharia, the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord. 2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21.

coincidences (accidentally, as it must in that case have been) attend the forger's mistake.

First, that we have a Zacharias in the book of Chronicles, whose death, and the manner of it, corresponds with the allusion.

Secondly, that although the name of this person's father be erroneously put down in the Gospel, yet we have a way of accounting for the error, by showing another Zacharias in the Jewish Scriptures, much better known than the former, whose patronymic was actually that which appears in the text.

Every one who thinks upon the subject, will find these to be circumstances which could not have met together in a mistake, which did not proceed from the circumstances themselves.

I have noticed, I think, all the difficulties of this kind. They are few: some of them admit of a clear, others of a probable solution. The reader will compare them with the number, the variety, the closeness, and the satisfactoriness, of the instances which are to be set against them: and he will remember the scantiness, in many cases, of our intelligence, and that difficulties always attend imperfect information.

## CHAP. VII.

### *Undesigned Coincidences.*

BETWEEN the letters which bear the name of Saint Paul in our collection, and his history in the Acts of the Apostles, there exist many notes of correspondency. The simple perusal of the writings is sufficient to prove, that neither the history was taken from the letters, nor the letters from the history. And the *undesignedness* of the agreements (which undesignedness is gathered from their latency, their minuteness, their obliquity, the suitableness of the circumstances in which they consist, to the places in which those circumstances occur, and the circuitous references by which they are traced out) demonstrates that they have not been produced by meditation, or by any fraudulent contrivance. But coincidences, from which these causes are excluded, and which are too close and numerous to be accounted for by accidental concurrences of fiction, must necessarily have truth for their foundation.

This argument appeared to my mind of so much value (especially for its assuming nothing beside the existence of the books), that I have pursued it through St. Paul's thirteen epistles, in a work published by me four years ago, under the title of *Horæ Paulinæ*. I am sensible how feebly any argument which depends upon an induction of particulars, is represented without examples. On which account, I wished to have abridged my own volume, in the manner in which I have treated Dr. Lardner's in the preceding chapter. But, upon making the attempt, I did not find it in my power to render the articles intelligible by fewer words than I have there used. I must be content, therefore, to refer the reader to the work



itself. And I would particularly invite his attention to the observations which are made in it upon the first three epistles. I persuade myself that he will find the proofs, both of agreement and undesignedness, supplied by these epistles, sufficient to support the conclusion which is there maintained, in favor both of the genuineness of the writings and the truth of the narrative.

It remains only, in this place, to point out how the argument bears upon the general question of the Christian history.

First, Saint Paul in these letters affirms in unequivocal terms, his own performance of miracles, and, what ought particularly to be remembered, *'That miracles were the signs of an apostle.'*\* If this testimony come from St. Paul's own hand, it is invaluable. And that it does so, the argument before us fixes in my mind a firm assurance.

Secondly, it shows that the series of action represented in the epistles of Saint Paul, was real; which alone lays a foundation for the proposition which forms the subject of the first part of our present work, viz. that the original witnesses of the Christian history devoted themselves to lives of toil, suffering, and danger, in consequence of their belief of the truth of that history, and for the sake of communicating the knowledge of it to others.

Thirdly, it proves that Luke, or whoever was the author of the Acts of the Apostles (for the argument does not depend upon the name of the author, though I know no reason for questioning it), was well acquainted with Saint Paul's history; and that he probably was, what he professes himself to be, a companion of Saint Paul's travels; which, if true, establishes, in a considerable degree, the credit even of his Gospel, because it shows, that the writer, from his time, situation, and connexion, possessed opportunities of informing himself truly concerning the transactions which he relates. I have little difficulty in applying to the Gospel of Saint Luke what is proved concerning the Acts of the Apostles, considering them as two parts of the same history; for, though there are instances of *second* parts being forgeries, I know none where the second part is genuine, and the first not so.

I will only observe, as a sequel of the argument, though not noticed in my work, the remarkable similitude between the style of Saint John's Gospel, and of Saint John's Epistle. The style of Saint John's is not at all the style of Saint Paul's Epistles, though both are very singular; nor is it the style of Saint James's nor of Saint Peter's Epistle: but it bears a resemblance to the style of the Gospel inscribed with Saint John's name, so far as that resemblance can be expected to appear, which is not in simple narrative, so much as in reflections, and in the representation of discourses. Writings, so circumstanced, prove themselves, and one another, to be genuine. This correspondence is the more valuable, as the epistle itself asserts, in Saint John's manner indeed, but in terms sufficiently explicit, the writer's personal knowledge of Christ's

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\* Rom. xv. 18, 19. 2 Cor. xii. 12.

history: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life; that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.\*' Who would not desire,—who perceives not the value of an account, delivered by a writer so well informed as this?

## CHAP. VIII.

### *Of the History of the Resurrection.*

THE history of the resurrection of Christ is a part of the evidence of Christianity: but I do not know, whether the proper strength of this passage of the Christian history, or wherein its peculiar value, as a head of evidence, consists, be generally understood. It is not that, as a miracle, the resurrection ought to be accounted a more decisive proof of supernatural agency than other miracles are; it is not that, as it stands in the Gospels, it is better attested than some others; it is not, for either of these reasons, that more weight belongs to it than to other miracles, but for the following, *viz.* That it is completely certain that the apostles of Christ, and the first teachers of Christianity, asserted the fact. And this would have been certain, if the four Gospels had been lost, or never written. Every piece of Scripture recognizes the resurrection. Every epistle of every apostle, every author contemporary with the apostles, of the age immediately succeeding the apostles, every writing from that age to the present, genuine or spurious, on the side of Christianity or against it, concur in representing the resurrection of Christ as an article of his history, received without doubt or disagreement by all who call themselves Christians, as alleged from the beginning by the propagators of the institution, and alleged as the centre of their testimony. Nothing, I apprehend, which a man does not himself see or hear, can be more certain to him than this point. I do not mean, that nothing can be more certain than that Christ rose from the dead; but that nothing can be more certain, than that his apostles, and the first teachers of Christianity, gave out that he did so. In the other parts of the gospel narrative, a question may be made, whether the things related of Christ be the very things which the apostles and first teachers of the religion delivered concerning him? And this question depends a good deal upon the evidence we possess of the genuineness, or rather, perhaps, of the antiquity, credit, and reception, of the books. On the subject of the resurrection, no such discussion is necessary, because no such doubt can be entertained. The only points which can enter into our consideration are, whether the apostles knowingly published a falsehood, or whether they were themselves deceived; whether either of these suppositions be possible. The first, I think, is pretty generally

given up. The nature of the undertaking, and of the men; the extreme unlikelihood that such men should engage in such a measure as a *scheme*; their personal toils, and dangers, and sufferings, in the cause; their appropriation of their whole time to the object; the warm, and seemingly unaffected, zeal and earnestness with which they profess their sincerity; exempt their memory from the suspicion of imposture. The solution more deserving of notice, is that which would resolve the conduct of the apostles into *enthusiasm*; which would class the evidence of Christ's resurrection with the numerous stories that are extant of the apparitions of dead men. There are circumstances in the narrative, as it is preserved in our histories, which destroy this comparison entirely. It was not one person, but many, who saw him; they saw him not only separately but together, not only by night but by day; not at a distance but near; not once but several times; they not only saw him, but touched him, conversed with him, ate with him, examined his person to satisfy their doubts. These particulars are decisive: but they stand, I do admit, upon the credit of our records. I would answer, therefore, the insinuation of enthusiasm, by a circumstance which arises out of the nature of the thing; and the reality of which must be confessed by all who allow, what I believe is not denied, that the resurrection of Christ, whether true or false, was asserted by his disciples from the beginning; and that circumstance is, the non-production of the dead body. It is related in the history, what indeed the story of the resurrection necessarily implies, that the corpse was missing out of the sepulchre: it is related also in the history, that the Jews reported that the followers of Christ had stolen it away.\* And this account, though loaded with great improbabilities, such as the situation of the disciples, their fears for their own safety at the time, the unlikelihood of their expecting to succeed, the difficulty of actual success,† and the inevitable consequence of detection and failure, was, nevertheless, the most credible account that could be given of the matter. But it proceeds entirely upon the supposition of fraud, as all the old objections did. What account can be given of the *body*, upon the supposition of en-

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\* 'And this saying (Saint Matthew writes) is commonly reported amongst the Jews until this day.' (chap. xxviii. 15.) The evangelist may be thought good authority as to this point, even by those who do not admit his evidence in every other point: and this point is sufficient to prove that the body was missing.

It has been rightly, I think, observed by Dr. Townshend, (Dis. upon the Res. p. 126.) that the story of the guards carried collusion upon the face of it:—'His disciples came by night and stole him away, while we slept.' Men in their circumstances would not have made such an acknowledgment of their negligence, without previous assurances of protection and impunity.

† 'Especially at the full moon, the city full of people, many probably passing the whole night, as Jesus and his disciples had done, in the open air, the sepulchre so near the city as to be now inclosed within the walls.' Priestley on the Resurr. p. 24.

thusiasm? It is impossible our Lord's followers could believe that he was risen from the dead, if his corpse was lying before them. No enthusiasm ever reached to such a pitch of extravagancy as that: a spirit may be an illusion; a body is a real thing, an object of sense, in which there can be no mistake. All accounts of spectres leave the body in the grave. And, although the body of Christ might be removed by *fraud*, and for the purposes of fraud, yet, without any such intention, and by sincere but deluded men (which is the representation of the apostolic character we are now examining), no such attempt could be made. The presence and the absence of the dead body are alike inconsistent with the hypothesis of enthusiasm; for, if present, it must have cured their enthusiasm at once; if absent, fraud, not enthusiasm, must have carried it away.

But farther, if we admit, upon the concurrent testimony of all the histories, so much of the account as states that the religion of Jesus was set up at Jerusalem, and set up with asserting, in the very place in which he had been buried, and a few days after he had been buried, his resurrection out of the grave, it is evident that, if his body could have been found, the Jews would have produced it, as the shortest and completest answer possible to the whole story. The attempt of the apostles could not have survived this refutation a moment. If we also admit, upon the authority of Saint Matthew, that the Jews were advertised of the expectation of Christ's followers, and that they had taken due precaution in consequence of this notice, and that the body was in marked and public custody, the observation receives more force still. For, notwithstanding their precaution, and although thus prepared and forewarned; when the story of the resurrection of Christ came forth, as it immediately did; when it was publicly asserted by his disciples, and made the ground and basis of their preaching in his name, and collecting followers to his religion, the Jews had not the body to produce: but were obliged to meet the testimony of the apostles by an answer, not containing indeed any impossibility in itself, but absolutely inconsistent with the supposition of their integrity; that is, in other words, inconsistent with the supposition which would resolve their conduct into enthusiasm.

## CHAP. IX.

### *The Propagation of Christianity.*

IN this argument, the first consideration is the fact; in what degree, within what time, and to what extent, Christianity was actually propagated.

## SECT. I.

*In what degree, within what time, and to what extent, Christianity was actually propagated.*

THE accounts of the matter, which can be collected from our books, are as follows: A *few days* after Christ's disappearance out of the world, we find an assembly of disciples at Jerusalem, to the number of 'about one hundred and twenty;\*' which hundred and twenty were, probably, a little association of believers, met together, not merely as believers in Christ, but as personally connected with the apostles, and with one another. Whatever was the number of believers then in Jerusalem, we have no reason to be surprised that so small a company should assemble: for there is no proof, that the followers of Christ were yet formed into a society; that the society was reduced into any order; that it was at this time even understood that a new religion (in the sense which that term conveys to us) was to be set up in the world, or how the professors of that religion were to be distinguished from the rest of mankind. The death of Christ had left, we may suppose, the generality of his disciples in great doubt, both as to what they were to do, and concerning what was to follow.

This meeting was holden, as we have already said, a few days after Christ's ascension: for, ten days after that event was the day of Pentecost, when, as our history relates,† upon a signal display of Divine agency attending the persons of the apostles, there were added to the society 'about three thousand souls.† But here, it is not, I think, to be taken, that these three thousand were all converted by this single miracle; but rather that many, who before were believers in Christ, became now professors of Christianity; that is to say, when they found that a religion was to be established, a society formed and set up in the name of Christ, governed by his laws, avowing their belief in his mission, united amongst themselves, and separated from the rest of the world by visible distinctions; in pursuance of their former conviction, and by virtue of what they had heard and seen and known of Christ's history, they publicly became members of it.

We read in the fourth chapter§ of the Acts, that, soon after this, 'the number of the men,' *i. e.* the society openly professing their belief in Christ, 'was about five thousand.' So that here is an increase of two thousand within a very short time. And it is probable that there were many, both now and afterward, who, although they believed in Christ, did not think it necessary to join themselves to this society; or who waited to see what was likely to become of it. Gamaliel, whose advice to the Jewish council is recorded Acts v.

\* Acts i. 15.

† Acts ii. 1.

‡ Acts ii. 41.

§ Ver. 4.

34, appears to have been of this description; perhaps Nicodemus, and perhaps also Joseph of Arimathea. This class of men, their character and their rank, are likewise pointed out by Saint John, in the twelfth chapter of his Gospel: 'Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also, many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' Persons, such as these, might admit the miracles of Christ, without being immediately convinced that they were under obligation to make a public profession of Christianity, at the risk of all that was dear to them in life, and even of life itself.\*

Christianity, however, proceeded to increase in Jerusalem by a progress equally rapid with its first success; for, in the next chapter of our history, we read that 'believers were the more added to the Lord, *multitudes* both of men and women.' And this enlargement of the new society appears in the first verse of the succeeding chapter, wherein we are told, that, 'when the number of the disciples was *multiplied*, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected:† and, afterward in the same chapter, it is declared expressly, that 'the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.'

This I call the first period in the propagation of Christianity. It commences with the ascension of Christ, and extends, as may be collected from the incidental notes of time,§ to something more than one year after that event. During which term, the preaching of Christianity, so far as our documents inform us, was confined to the single city of Jerusalem. And how did it succeed there? The first assembly which we meet with of Christ's disciples, and that a few days after his removal from the world, consisted of 'one hundred and twenty.' About a week after this, 'three thousand were added

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\* 'Beside those who professed, and those who rejected and opposed, Christianity, there were, in all probability, multitudes between both, neither perfect Christians, nor yet unbelievers. They had a favorable opinion of the gospel, but worldly considerations made them unwilling to own it. There were many circumstances which inclined them to think that Christianity was a Divine revelation, but there were many inconveniences which attended the open profession of it: and they could not find in themselves courage enough to bear them, to disoblige their friends and family, to ruin their fortunes, to lose their reputation, their liberty, and their life, for the sake of the new religion. Therefore they were willing to hope, that if they endeavored to observe the great principles of morality, which Christ had represented as the principal part, the sum and substance, of religion; if they thought honorably of the gospel, if they offered no injury to the Christians, if they did deem all the services that they could *safely* perform, they were willing to hope, that God would accept this, and that He would excuse and forgive the rest.' Jortin's Dis. on the Chris. Rel. p. 91. ed. 4.

† Acts v. 14.

‡ Acts vi. 1.

§ Vide Pearson's Antiq. l. xviii. c. 7. Benson's History of Christ, book i. p. 148.

in one day;' and the number of Christians publicly baptized, and publicly associating together, was very soon increased to 'five thousand.' 'Multitudes both of men and women continued to be added;' 'disciples multiplied greatly,' and 'many of the Jewish priesthood, as well as others, became obedient to the faith;' and this within a space of less than two years from the commencement of the institution.

By reason of a persecution raised against the church at Jerusalem, the converts were driven from that city, and dispersed throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.\* Wherever they came, they brought their religion with them: for, our historian informs us,† that 'they that were scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the word.' The effect of this preaching comes afterward to be noticed, where the historian is led, in the course of his narrative, to observe, that *then*, (*i. e.* about three years posterior to this,‡) 'the churches had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.' This was the work of the second period, which comprises about four years.

Hitherto the preaching of the Gospel had been confined to Jews, to Jewish proselytes, and to Samaritans. And I cannot forbear from setting down in this place, an observation of Mr. Bryant, which appears to me to be perfectly well founded:—'The Jews still remain: but how seldom is it that we can make a single proselyte! There is reason to think, that there were more converted by the apostles in one day, than have since been won over in the last thousand years.'§

It was not yet known to the apostles, that they were at liberty to propose the religion to mankind at large. That 'mystery,' as Saint Paul calls it,|| and as it then was, was revealed to Peter by an especial miracle. It appears to have been¶ about seven years after Christ's ascension, that the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles of Cesarea. A year after this, a great multitude of Gentiles were converted at Antioch in Syria. The expressions employed by the historian are these:—'A great number believed, and turned to the Lord;' 'much people was added unto the Lord;' 'the apostles Barnabas and Paul taught much people.'\*\* Upon Herod's death, which happened in the next year,†† it is observed, that 'the word of God grew and multiplied.'‡‡ Three years from this time, upon the preaching of Paul at Iconium, the metropolis of Lycaonia, 'a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed:§§ and afterward, in the course of this very progress, he is represented as 'making many disciples' at Derbe, a principal city in the same district. Three years|||| after this, which brings us to sixteen after the ascension, the apostles

\* Acts viii. 1.

† Ver. 4.

‡ Benson, book i. p. 207

§ Bryant on the Truth of the Christian Religion, p. 112.

|| Eph. iii. 3—6.

¶ Benson, book ii. p. 236.

\*\* Acts xi. 21. 24. 26.

†† Benson, book ii. p. 289.

‡‡ Acts xii. 24.

§§ Acts xiv. 1.

|||| Benson, book iii. p. 50.

wrote a public letter from Jerusalem to the Gentile converts in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, with which letter Paul travelled through these countries, and found the churches 'established in the faith, and increasing in number daily.\* From Asia, the apostle proceeded into Greece, where soon after his arrival in Macedonia, we find him at Thessalonica; in which city, 'some of the Jews believed, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude.† We meet also here with an accidental hint of the general progress of the Christian mission, in the exclamation of the tumultuous Jews of Thessalonica, 'that they, who had turned the world upside down, were come thither also.‡ At Berea, the next city at which Paul arrives, the historian, who was present, informs us that '*many* of the Jews believed.§ The next year and a half of Saint Paul's ministry was spent at Corinth. Of his success in that city, we receive the following intimations: 'that *many* of the Corinthians believed and were baptized;' and 'that it was revealed to the apostle by Christ, that he had *much* people in that city.¶ Within less than a year after his departure from Corinth, and twenty-five|| years after the ascension, Saint Paul fixed his station at Ephesus, for the space of two years\*\* and something more. The effect of his ministry in that city and neighborhood drew from the historian a reflection, how 'mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.'†† And at the conclusion of this period, we find Demetrius at the head of a party, who were alarmed by the progress of the religion, complaining, that 'not only at Ephesus, but also throughout all Asia (*i. e.* the province of Lydia, and the country adjoining to Ephesus), this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people.'‡‡ Beside these accounts, there occurs, incidentally, mention of converts at Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Cyprus, Cyrene, Macedonia, Philippi.

This is the third period in the propagation of Christianity, setting off in the seventh year after the ascension, and ending at the twenty-eighth. Now, lay these three periods together, and observe how the progress of the religion by these accounts is represented. The institution, which properly *began* only after its author's removal from the world, before the end of thirty years had spread itself through Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, almost all the numerous districts of the Lesser Asia, through Greece, and the islands of the Ægean Sea, the sea-coast of Africa, and had extended itself to Rome, and into Italy. At Antioch in Syria, at Joppa, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Berea, Iconium, Derbe, Antioch in Pisidia, at Lydda, Saron, the number of converts is intimated by the expressions, 'a great number,' 'great multitude,' 'much people.' Converts are mentioned, without any designation of their number,§§ at

\* Acts xvi. 5.

† Acts xvii. 4.

‡ Acts xvii. 6.

§ Acts xvii. 12.

|| Acts xviii. 8—10.

¶ Benson, book iii. p. 160.

\*\* Acts xix. 10.

†† Acts xix. 20.

‡‡ Acts xix. 26.

§§ Considering the extreme conciseness of many parts of the history, the silence about the numbers of converts is no proof of their paucity; for at Philippi, no mention whatever is made of the number, yet Saint



Tyre, Cesarea, Troas, Athens, Philippi, Lystra, Damascus. During all this time, Jerusalem continued not only the centre of the mission, but a principal seat of the religion; for when Saint Paul turned thither at the conclusion of the period of which we are now considering the accounts, the other apostles pointed out to him, as a reason for his compliance with their advice, 'how many thousands (myriads, ten thousands) there were in that city who believed.\*'

Upon this abstract, and the writing from which it is drawn, the following observations seem material to be made:

I. That the account comes from a person, who was himself concerned in a portion of what he relates, and was contemporary with the whole of it; who visited Jerusalem, and frequented the society of those who had acted, and were acting, the chief parts in the transaction. I lay down this point positively; for had the ancient attestations to this valuable record been less satisfactory than they are, the unaffectedness and simplicity with which the author notes his presence upon certain occasions, and the entire absence of art and design from these notices, would have been sufficient to persuade my mind, that whoever he was, he actually lived in the times, and occupied the situation, in which he represents himself to be. When I say, 'whoever he was,' I do not mean to cast a doubt upon the name to which antiquity hath ascribed the Acts of the Apostles (for there is no cause that I am acquainted with, for questioning it), but to observe that, in such a case as this, the time and situation of the author are of more importance than his name; and that *these* appear from the work itself, and in the most unsuspecting form.

II. That this account is a very *incomplete* account of the preaching and propagation of Christianity; I mean, that, if what we read in the history be true, much more than what the history contains must be true also. For, although the narrative from which our information is derived, has been entitled the Acts of the Apostles, it is in fact a history of the twelve apostles only during a short time of their continuing together at Jerusalem; and even of this period the account is very concise. The work afterward consists of a few important passages of Peter's ministry, of the speech and death of Stephen, of the preaching of Philip the deacon; and the sequel of the volume, that is, two-thirds of the whole, is taken up with the conversion, the travels, the discourses, and history of the new apostle, Paul; in which history, also, large portions of time are often passed over with very scanty notice.

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Paul addressed an epistle to that church. The churches of Galatia, and the affairs of those churches, were considerable enough to be the subject of another letter, and of much of Saint Paul's solicitude: yet no account is preserved in the history of his success, or even of his preaching in that country, except the slight notice which these words convey:—'When they had gone throughout Phrygia, and the region of Galatia—they essayed to go into Bithynia.' Acts xvi. 6.

\* Acts xxi. 20.

III. That the account, so far as it goes, is for this very reason more credible. Had it been the author's design to have *displayed* the early progress of Christianity, he would undoubtedly have collected, or, at least, have set forth, accounts of the preaching of the rest of the apostles, who cannot, without extreme improbability, be supposed to have remained silent and inactive, or not to have met with a share of that success which attended their colleagues. To which may be added, as an observation of the same kind,

IV. That the intimations of the number of converts, and of the success of the preaching of the apostles, come out for the most part *incidentally*; are drawn from the historian by the occasion; such as the murmuring of the Grecian converts; the rest from persecution; Herod's death; the sending of Barnabas to Antioch, and Barnabas calling Paul to his assistance; Paul coming to a place, and finding there disciples; the clamor of the Jews; the complaint of artificers interested in the support of the popular religion; the reason assigned to induce Paul to give satisfaction to the Christians of Jerusalem. Had it not been for these occasions, it is probable that no notice whatever would have been taken of the number of converts in several of the passages in which that notice now appears. All this tends to remove the suspicion of a design to exaggerate or deceive.

PARALLEL TESTIMONIES with the history, are the letters of Saint Paul, and of the other apostles, which have come down to us. Those of Saint Paul are addressed to the churches of Corinth, Philippi, Thessalonica, the church of Galatia, and, if the inscription be right, of Ephesus; his ministry at all which places, is recorded in the history: to the church of Colosse, or rather to the churches of Colosse and Laodicea jointly, which he had not then visited. They recognize by reference the churches of Judea, the churches of Asia, and 'all the churches of the Gentiles.\*' In the Epistle to the Romans,† the author is led to deliver a remarkable declaration concerning the extent of his preaching, its efficacy, and the cause to which he ascribes it,—'to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.' In the Epistle to the Colossians,‡ we find an oblique but very strong signification of the then general state of the Christian mission, at least as it appeared to Saint Paul:—'If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and *which was preached to every creature which is under heaven*;' which Gospel, he had reminded them near the beginning§ of his letter, 'was present with them, *as it was in all the world*.' The expressions are hyperbolical; but they are hyperboles which could only be used by a writer who entertained a strong sense of the subject. The first epistle of Peter accosts the Christians

\* 1 Thess. ii. 14.

† Rom. xv. 18, 19.

‡ Col. i. 23.

§ Col. i. 6.

dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

It comes next to be considered, how far these accounts are confirmed, or followed up by other evidence.

Tacitus, in delivering a relation, which has already been laid before the reader, of the fire which happened at Rome in the tenth year of Nero (which coincides with the thirtieth year after Christ's ascension), asserts, that the emperor, in order to suppress the rumors of having been himself the author of the mischief, procured the Christians to be accused. Of which Christians, thus brought into his narrative, the following is so much of the historian's account as belongs to our present purpose: 'They had their denomination from Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, though checked for awhile, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, but reached the city also. At first, they only were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterward a *vast multitude* were discovered by them.' This testimony to the early propagation of Christianity is extremely material. It is from an historian of great reputation, living near the time; from a stranger and an enemy to the religion; and it joins immediately with the period through which the Scripture accounts extend. It establishes these points: that the religion began at Jerusalem; that it spread throughout Judea; that it had reached Rome, and not only so, but that it had there obtained a great number of converts. This was about six years after the time that Saint Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, and something more than two years after he arrived there himself. The converts to the religion were then so numerous at Rome, that, of those who were betrayed by the information of the persons first persecuted, a great multitude (*multitudo ingens*) were discovered and seized.

It seems probable, that the temporary check which Tacitus represents Christianity to have received (*repressa in præsens*) referred to the persecution at Jerusalem, which followed the death of Stephen (*Acts viii.*); and which, by dispersing the converts, caused the institution, in some measure, to disappear. Its second eruption at the same place, and within a short time, has much in it of the character of truth. It was the firmness and perseverance of men who knew what they relied upon.

Next in order of time, and perhaps superior in importance, is the testimony of Pliny the Younger. Pliny was the Roman governor of Pontus and Bithynia, two considerable districts in the northern part of Asia Minor. The situation in which he found his province, led him to apply to the emperor (Trajan) for his direction as to the conduct he was to hold towards the Christians. The letter in which this application is contained, was written not quite eighty years after Christ's ascension. The president, in this letter, states the measures he had already pursued, and then adds, as his reason for resorting to the emperor's counsel and authority, the following

words:—‘Suspending all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice; for it has appeared to me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering: for, many of all ages, and of every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country. Nevertheless it seemed to me, that it may be restrained and corrected. It is certain that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims, likewise, are everywhere (*passim*) bought up; whereas, for some time, there were few to purchase them. Whence it is easy to imagine, that numbers of men might be reclaimed, if pardon were granted to those that shall repent.’\*

It is obvious to observe, that the passage of Pliny’s letter, here quoted, proves, not only that the Christians in Pontus and Bithynia were now numerous, but that they had subsisted there for some considerable time. ‘It is certain,’ he says, ‘that the temples, which were almost forsaken (plainly ascribing this desertion of the popular worship to the prevalency of Christianity), begin to be more frequented, and the sacred solemnities, after a *long* intermission, are revived.’ There are also two clauses in the former part of the letter, which indicate the same thing; one, in which he declares that he had ‘never been present at any trials of Christians, and therefore knew not what was the usual subject of inquiry and punishment, or how far either was wont to be urged.’ The second clause is the following: ‘Others were named by an informer, who, at first, confessed themselves Christians, and afterward denied it; the rest said, they had been Christians, some three years ago, some longer, and some about twenty years.’ It is also apparent, that Pliny speaks of the Christians as a description of men well known to the person to whom he writes. His first sentence concerning them is, ‘I have never been present at the trials of Christians.’ This mention of the name of Christians, without any preparatory explanation, shows that it was a term familiar both to the writer of the letter, and the person to whom it was addressed. Had it not been so, Pliny would naturally have begun his letter by informing the emperor, that he had met with a certain set of men in the province, called Christians.

Here then is a very singular evidence of the progress of the Christian religion in a short space. It was not fourscore years after the crucifixion of Jesus, when Pliny wrote this letter; nor seventy years since the apostles of Jesus began to mention his name to the Gentile world. Bithynia and Pontus were at a great distance from Judea, the centre from which the religion spread; yet in these provinces, Christianity had long subsisted, and Christians were now in such numbers as to lead the Roman governor to report to the emperor, that they were found not only in cities, but

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\* C. Plin. Trajano Imp. lib. x. ep. xcvi.

in villages and in open countries; of all ages, of every rank and condition; that they abounded so much, as to have produced a visible desertion of the temples; that beasts brought to market for victims, had few purchasers; that the sacred solemnities were much neglected:—circumstances noted by Pliny, for the express purpose of showing to the emperor the effect and prevalency of the new institution.

No evidence remains, by which it can be proved that the Christians were more numerous in Pontus and Bithynia than in other parts of the Roman empire; nor has any reason been offered to show why they should be so. Christianity did not begin in these countries, nor near them. I do not know, therefore, that we ought to confine the description in Pliny's letter to the state of Christianity in those provinces, even if no other account of the same subject had come down to us; but, certainly, this letter may fairly be applied in aid and confirmation of the representations given of the general state of Christianity in the world, by Christian writers of that and the next succeeding age.

Justin Martyr, who wrote about thirty years after Pliny, and one hundred and six after the Ascension, has these remarkable words: 'There is not a nation, either of Greek or Barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes, and live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the Universe by the name of the crucified Jesus.\*' Tertullian, who comes about fifty years after Justin, appeals to the governors of the Roman empire in these terms: 'We were but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, islands, towns, and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum. They (the heathen adversaries of Christianity) lament, that every sex, age, and condition, and persons of every rank also, are converts to that name.†' I do allow, that these expressions are loose, and may be called declamatory. But even declamation hath its bounds: this public boasting upon a subject which must be known to every reader was not only useless but unnatural, unless the truth of the case, in a considerable degree, correspond with the description; at least, unless it had been both true and notorious, that great multitudes of Christians, of all ranks and orders, were to be found in most parts of the Roman empire. The same Tertullian, in another passage, by way of setting forth the extensive diffusion of Christianity, enumerates as belonging to Christ, beside many other countries, the 'Moors and Gætulians of Africa, the borders of Spain, several nations of France, and parts of Britain, inaccessible to the Romans, the Samaritans, Daci, Germans, and Scythians,‡' and, which is more material than the extent of the institution, the *number* of Christians in the several countries in which it prevailed, is thus expressed by him: 'Although so great a multitude that in almost every city we form the greater part, we pass our time modestly and in silence.§'

\* Dial. cum Tryph.

† Ad. Jud. c. 7.

‡ Tertull. Apoll. c. 37.

§ Ad. Scap. c. 111.

Clemens Alexandrinus, who preceded Tertullian by a few years, introduces a comparison between the success of Christianity and that of the most celebrated philosophical institutions: 'The philosophers were confined to Greece, and to their particular retainers: but the doctrine of the Master of Christianity did not remain in Judea, as philosophy did in Greece, but it spread throughout the whole world, in every nation, and village, and city, both of Greeks and Barbarians, converting both whole houses and separate individuals, having already brought over to the truth not a few of the philosophers themselves. If the Greek philosophy be prohibited, it immediately vanishes; whereas, from the first preaching of *our* doctrine, kings and tyrants, governors and presidents, with their whole train, and with the populace on their side, have endeavored with their whole might to exterminate it, yet doth it flourish more and more.\* Origen, who follows Tertullian at the distance of only thirty years, delivers nearly the same account: 'In every part of the world (says he), throughout all Greece, and in all other nations, there are innumerable and immense multitudes, who, having left the laws of their country, and those whom they esteemed gods, have given themselves up to the law of Moses, and the religion of Christ: and this not without the bitterest resentment from the idolaters, by whom they were frequently put to torture, and sometimes to death: and it is wonderful to observe, how, in so short a time, the religion has increased, amidst punishment and death, and every kind of torture.† In another passage, Origen draws the following candid comparison between the state of Christianity in his time, and the condition of its more primitive ages: 'By the good providence of God, the Christian religion has so flourished and increased continually, that it is now preached freely without molestation, although there were a thousand obstacles to the spreading of the doctrine of Jesus in the world. But as it was the will of God that the Gentiles should have the benefit of it, all the counsels of men against the Christians were defeated; and by how much the more emperors and governors of provinces, and the people everywhere, strove to depress them; so much the more have they increased, and prevailed exceedingly.‡

It is well known, that within less than eighty years after this, the Roman empire became Christian under Constantine: and it is probable that Constantine declared himself on the side of the Christians, because they were the powerful party; for Arnobius, who wrote immediately before Constantine's accession, speaks of the whole world as filled with Christ's doctrine, of its diffusion throughout all countries, of an innumerable body of Christians in distant provinces, of the strange revolution of opinion of men of the greatest genius, orators, grammarians, rhetoricians, lawyers, physicians, having come over to the institution, and that also in the face of threats, execu-

\* Clem. Al. Strum. lib. vi. ad fin.

† Orig. in Cels. lib.

‡ Orig. cont. Cels. lib. vii.

tions, and tortures.\* And not more than twenty years after Constantine's entire possession of the empire, Julius Firmicus Maternus calls upon the emperors Constantius and Constans to extirpate the relics of the ancient religion; the reduced and fallen condition of which is described by our author in the following words: 'Licet adhuc in quibusdam regionibus idololatriæ morientia palpitent membra; tamen in eo reo est, ut à Christianis omnibus terris pestiferum hoc malum funditus amputetur:' and in another place, 'Modicum tantum superest, ut legibus vestris—extincta idololatriæ pereat funesta contagio.†' It will not be thought that we quote this writer in order to recommend his temper or his judgment, but to show the comparative state of Christianity and of Heathenism at this period. Fifty years afterward, Jerome represents the decline of Paganism in language which conveys the same idea of its approaching extinction: 'Solitudinem patitur et in urbe gentilitas. Dii quondam nationum, cum bubonibus et noctuis, in solis culminibus remanserunt.‡' Jerome here indulges a triumph, natural and allowable in a zealous friend of the cause, but which could only be suggested to his mind by the consent and universality with which he saw the religion received. 'But now (says he) the passion and resurrection of Christ are celebrated in the discourses and writings of all nations. I need not mention, Jews, Greeks, and Latins. The Indians, Persians, Goths, and Egyptians philosophize, and firmly believe the immortality of the soul, and future recompenses, which, before, the greatest philosophers had denied, or doubted of, or perplexed with their disputes. The fierceness of Thracians and Scythians is now softened by the gentle sound of the Gospel; and everywhere Christ is all in all.§' Were therefore the motives of Constantine's conversion ever so problematical, the easy establishment of Christianity, and the ruin of Heathenism, under him and his immediate successors, is of itself a proof of the progress which Christianity had made in the preceding period. It may be added also, 'that Maxentius, the rival of Constantine, had shown himself friendly to the Christians. Therefore of those who were contending for worldly power and empire, one actually favored and flattered them, and another may be suspected to have joined himself to them, partly from consideration of interest: so considerable were they become, under external disadvantages of all sorts.¶' This at least is certain, that throughout the whole transaction hitherto, the great seemed to follow, not to lead, the public opinion.

It may help to convey to us some notion of the extent and progress of Christianity, or rather of the character and quality of many early Christians, of their learning and their labors, to notice the number of Christian writers who flourished in these ages. Saint Jerome's

\* Arnob. in Gentes, l. i. p. 27. 9. 24. 42. 44. edit. Lug. Bat. 1650.

† De Error. Profan. Relig. c. xxi. p. 172, quoted by Lardner, vol. viii. p. 262.

‡ Jer. ad Lect. ep. 5. 7.

¶ Lardner, vol. vii. p. 380.

§ Jer. ep. 8. ad Heliod.

catalogue contains *sixty-six* writers within the first three centuries, and the first six years of the fourth; and *fifty-four* between that time and his own, viz. A. D. 392. Jerome introduces his catalogue with the following just remonstrance:—‘Let those who say the church has had no philosophers, nor eloquent and learned men, observe who and what they were who founded; established, and adorned it: let them cease to accuse our faith of rusticity, and confess their mistake.’\* Of these writers, several, as Justin, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Bardesanes, Hippolytus, Eusebius, were voluminous writers. Christian writers abounded particularly about the year 178. Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, founded a library in that city, A. D. 212. Pamphilus, the friend of Origen, founded a library at Cesarea, A. D. 294. Public defences were also set forth, by various advocates of the religion, in the course of its first three centuries. Within one hundred years after Christ’s ascension, Quadratus and Aristides, whose works, except some few fragments of the first, are lost; and, about twenty years afterward, Justin Martyr, whose works remain, presented apologies for the Christian religion to the Roman emperors; Quadratus and Aristides to Adrian, Justin to Antoninus Pius, and a second to Marcus Antoninus. Melito, bishop of Sardis, and Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, and Miltiades, men of great reputation, did the same to Marcus Antoninus, twenty years afterward:† and ten years after this, Apollonius, who suffered martyrdom under the emperor Commodus, composed an apology for his faith, which he read in the senate, and which was afterward published.‡ Fourteen years after the apology of Apollonius, Tertullian addressed the work which now remains under that name to the governors of provinces in the Roman empire; and, about the same time, Minucius Felix composed a defence of the Christian religion, which is still extant; and shortly after the conclusion of this century, copious defences of Christianity were published by Arnobius and Lactantius.

## SECT. II.

### *Reflections upon the preceding Account.*

IN viewing the progress of Christianity, our first attention is due to the number of converts at Jerusalem, immediately after its Founder’s death; because this success was a success at the *time*, and upon the *spot*, when and where the chief part of the history had been transacted.

We are, in the next place, called upon to attend to the early establishment of numerous Christian societies in Judea and Galilee; which countries had been the scene of Christ’s miracles and minis-

\* Jer. Prol. in Lib. de Scr. Eccl.

† Euseb. Hist. lib. iv. c. 26. See also Lardner, vol. ii. p. 666.

‡ Lardner, vol. ii. p. 687.



try, and where the memory of what had passed, and the knowledge of what was alleged, must have yet been fresh and certain.

We are, thirdly, invited to recollect the success of the apostles and of their companions, at the several places to which they came, both within and without Judea; because it was the credit given to original witnesses, appealing for the truth of their accounts to what themselves had seen and heard. The effect also of their preaching strongly confirms the truth of what our history positively and circumstantially relates, that they were able to exhibit to their hearers supernatural attestations of their mission.

We are, lastly, to consider the *subsequent* growth and spread of the religion, of which we receive successive intimations, and satisfactory, though general and occasional, accounts, until its full and final establishment.

In all these several stages, the history is without a parallel: for it must be observed, that we have not now been tracing the progress, and describing the prevalency, of an opinion, founded upon philosophical or critical arguments, upon mere deduction of reason, or the construction of ancient writings (of which kind are the several theories which have, at different times, gained possession of the public mind in various departments of science and literature; and of one or other of which kind are the tenets also which divide the various sects of Christianity); but that we speak of a system, the very basis and postulatium of which was a supernatural character ascribed to a particular person; of a doctrine, the truth whereof depends entirely upon the truth of a matter of fact then recent. 'To establish a new religion, even amongst a few people, or in one single nation, is a thing in itself exceedingly difficult. To reform some corruptions which may have spread in a religion, or to make new regulations in it, is not perhaps so hard, when the main and principal part of that religion is preserved entire and unshaken; and yet this very often cannot be accomplished without an extraordinary concurrence of circumstances, and may be attempted a thousand times without success. But to introduce a new faith; a new way of thinking and acting, and to persuade many nations to quit the religion in which their ancestors have lived and died, which had been delivered down to them from time immemorial, to make them forsake and despise the deities which they had been accustomed to reverence and worship; this is a work of still greater difficulty.\* The resistance of education, worldly policy, and superstition, is almost invincible.'

If men, in these days, be Christians in consequence of their education, in submission to authority, or in compliance with fashion, let us recollect that the very contrary of this, at the beginning, was the case. The first race of Christians, as well as millions who succeeded them, became such in formal opposition to all these motives, to the whole power and strength of this influence. Every argu-

ment, therefore, and every instance, which sets forth the prejudice of education, and the almost irresistible effects of that prejudice (and no persons are more fond of expatiating upon this subject than deistical writers), in fact confirms the evidence of Christianity.

But, in order to judge of the argument which is drawn from the early propagation of Christianity, I know no fairer way of proceeding than to compare what we have seen on the subject, with the success of Christian missions in modern ages. In the East India mission, supported by the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, we hear sometimes of thirty, sometimes of forty, being baptized in the course of a year, and these principally children. Of converts properly so called, that is, of adults voluntarily embracing Christianity, the number is extremely small. 'Notwithstanding the labor of missionaries for upwards of two hundred years, and the establishments of different Christian nations who support them, there are not twelve thousand Indian Christians, and those almost entirely outcasts.'\*

I lament, as much as any man, the little progress which Christianity has made in these countries, and the inconsiderable effect that has followed the labors of its missionaries: but I see in it a strong proof of the Divine origin of the religion. What had the apostles to assist them in propagating Christianity which the missionaries have not? If piety and zeal had been sufficient, I doubt not but that our missionaries possess these qualities in a high degree: for, nothing except piety and zeal could engage them in the undertaking. If sanctity of life and manners was the allurements, the conduct of these men is unblamable. If the advantage of education and learning be looked to, there is not one of the modern missionaries, who is not, in this respect, superior to all the apostles: and that not only absolutely, but, what is of more importance, *relatively*, in comparison, that is, with those amongst whom they exercise their office. If the intrinsic excellency of the religion, the perfection of its morality, the purity of its precepts, the eloquence or tenderness or sublimity of various parts of its writings, were the recommendations by which it made its way, these remain the same. If the character and circumstances, under which the preachers were introduced to the countries in which they taught, be accounted of importance, this advantage is all on the side of the modern missionaries. They come from a country and a people to which the Indian world look up with sentiments of deference. The apostles came forth amongst the Gentiles under no other name than that of Jews, which was precisely the character they despised and derided. If it be disgraceful in India to become a Christian, it could not be much less so to be enrolled amongst those, 'quos per flagitia invisos, vulgus Christianos appellabat.' If the religion which they had to encounter be considered, the difference, I apprehend, will not be great. The theology

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\* Sketches relating to the history, learning, and manners, of the Hindoos, p. 48; quoted by Dr. Robertson, Hist. Dis. concerning ancient India, p. 236.

of both was nearly the same: 'what is supposed to be performed by the power of Jupiter, of Neptune, of Æolus, of Mars, of Venus, according to the mythology of the West, is ascribed, in the East, to the agency of Agrio the god of fire, Varoon the god of oceans, Vayoo the god of wind, Cama the god of love.\* The sacred rites of the Western Polytheism were gay, festive, and licentious; the rites of the public religion in the East partake of the same character, with a more avowed indecency. 'In every function performed in the pagodas, as well as in every public procession, it is the office of these women (i. e. of women prepared by the Brahmins for the purpose), to dance before the idol, and to sing hymns in his praise; and it is difficult to say whether they trespass most against decency by the gestures they exhibit, or by the verses which they recite. The walls of the pagodas were covered with paintings in a style no less indelicate.†

On both sides of the comparison, the popular religion had a strong establishment. In ancient Greece and Rome, it was strictly incorporated with the state. The magistrate was the priest. The highest officers of government bore the most distinguished part in the celebration of the public rites. In India, a powerful and numerous cast possess exclusively the administration of the established worship; and are, of consequence, devoted to the service, and attached to its interest. In both, the prevailing mythology was destitute of any proper evidence: or rather, in both, the origin of the tradition is run up into ages long anterior to the existence of credible history, or of written language. The Indian chronology computes eras by millions of years, and the life of man by thousands;‡ and in these, or prior to these, is placed the history of their divinities. In both, the established superstition held the same place in the public opinion; that is to say, in both it was credited by the bulk of the people,§

\* Baghvat Geeta, p. 94, quoted by Dr. Robertson, Ind. Dis. p. 306.

† Others of the deities of the East are of an austere and gloomy character, to be propitiated by victims, sometimes by human sacrifices, and by voluntary torments of the most excruciating kind.—*Voyage de Gentil*, vol. i. p. 244—260. Preface to Code of Gentoo Laws, p. 57, quoted by Dr. Robertson, p. 320.

‡ 'The Suffec Jogue, or age of purity, is said to have lasted three million two hundred thousand years; and they hold that the life of man was extended in that age to one hundred thousand years; but there is a difference amongst the Indian writers, of six millions of years in the computation of this era.' *Ib.*

§ 'How absurd soever the articles of faith may be, which superstition has adopted, or how unhallowed the rites which it prescribes, the former are received, in every age and country, with unhesitating assent, by the great body of the people, and the latter observed with scrupulous exactness. In our reasonings concerning opinions and practices which differ widely from our own, we are extremely apt to err. Having been instructed ourselves in the principles of a religion, worthy in every respect of that Divine wisdom by which they were dictated, we frequently express wonder at the credulity of nations, in embracing systems of belief which appear to us so directly repugnant to right reason; and sometimes suspect that tenets so wild and extravagant do not really gain credit

but by the learned and philosophical part of the community, either derided, or regarded by them as only fit to be upholden for the sake of its political uses.\*

Or if it should be allowed, that the ancient heathens believed in their religion less generally than the present Indians do, I am far from thinking that this circumstance would afford any facility to the work of the apostles, above that of the modern missionaries. To me it appears, and I think it material to be remarked, that a disbelief of the established religion of their country has no tendency to dispose men for the reception of another; but that, on the contrary, it generates a settled contempt of all religious pretensions whatever. General infidelity is the hardest soil which the propagators of a new religion can have to work upon. Could a Methodist or Moravian promise himself a better chance of success with a French *esprit fort*, who had been accustomed to laugh at the popery of his country, than with a believing Mahometan or Hindoo? Or are our modern unbelievers in Christianity, for that reason, in danger of becoming Mahometans or Hindoos? It does not appear that the Jews, who had a body of historical evidence to offer for their religion, and who at that time undoubtedly entertained and held forth the expectation of a future state, derived any great advantage, as to the extension of their system, from the discredit into which the popular religion had fallen with many of their heathen neighbors.

We have particularly directed our observations to the state and progress of Christianity amongst the inhabitants of *India*: but the history of the Christian mission in other countries, where the efficacy of the mission is left solely to the conviction wrought by the preaching of strangers, presents the same idea, as the Indian mission does, of the feebleness and inadequacy of human means. About twenty-five years ago, was published in England a translation from the Dutch, of a History of Greenland, and a relation of the mission for above thirty years carried on in that country by the *Unitas Fratrum*, or Moravians. Every part of that relation confirms the opinion we have stated. Nothing could surpass, or hardly equal, the zeal and patience of the missionaries. Yet their historian, in the conclusion of his narrative, could find place for no reflections more encouraging than the following:—‘A person that had known the heathen, that had seen the little benefit from the great pains hitherto

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with them. But experience may satisfy us, that neither our wonder nor suspicions are well founded. No article of the public religion was called in question by those people of ancient Europe with whose history we are best acquainted; and no practice, which it enjoined, appeared improper to them. On the other hand, every opinion that tended to diminish the reverence of men for the gods of their country, or to alienate them from their worship, excited, among the Greeks and Romans, that indignant zeal which is natural to every people attached to their religion by a firm persuasion of its truth.’ *Ind. Dis.* p. 321.

\* That the learned Brahmins of the East are rational Theists, and secretly reject the established theory, and condemn the rites that were founded upon them, or rather consider them as contrivances to be supported for their political uses, see Dr. Robertson’s *Ind. Dis.* p. 324—334.

taken with them, and considered that one after another had abandoned all hopes of the conversion of those infidels (and some thought they would never be converted, till they saw miracles wrought as in the apostles' days, and this the Greenlanders expected and demanded of their instructors); one that considered this, I say, would not so much wonder at the past unfruitfulness of these young beginners, as at their stedfast perseverance in the midst of nothing but distress, difficulties, and impediments, internally, and externally; and that they never desponded of the conversion of those poor creatures amidst all seeming impossibilities.\*

From the widely disproportionate effects which attend the preaching of modern missionaries of Christianity, compared with what followed the ministry of Christ and his apostles under circumstances either alike, or not so unlike, as to account for the difference, a conclusion is fairly drawn, in support of what our histories deliver concerning them, viz. that they possessed means of conviction, which we have not; that they had proofs to appeal to, which we want.

### SECT. III.

#### *Of the Success of Mahometanism.*

THE only event in the history of the human species, which admits of comparison with the propagation of Christianity, is the success of Mahometanism. The Mahometan institution was rapid in its progress, was recent in its history, and was founded upon a supernatural or prophetic character assumed by its author. In these articles, the resemblance with Christianity is confessed. But there are points of difference, which separate, we apprehend, the two cases entirely.

I. Mahomet did not found his pretensions upon miracles, properly so called; that is, upon proofs of supernatural agency, capable of being known and attested by others. Christians are warranted in this assertion by the evidence of the Koran, in which Mahomet not only does not affect the power of working miracles, but expressly disclaims it. The following passages of that book furnish direct proofs of the truth of what we allege:—‘The infidels say, Unless a sign be sent down unto him from his lord, we will not believe; thou art a preacher only.’† Again; ‘Nothing hindered us from sending thee with miracles, except that the former nations have charged them with imposture.’‡ And lastly; ‘They say, unless a sign be sent down unto him from his lord, we will not believe: Answer; Signs are in the power of God alone, and I am no more than a public preacher. Is it not sufficient for them, that we have sent down unto them the book of the Koran to be read unto them?’§ Besides these acknowledgments, I have observed *thirteen* distinct places, in

\* History of Greenland, vol. ii. p. 376.

† Sale's Koran, c. xiii. p. 201. ed. quarto.

‡ Ch. xvii. p. 232.

§ Ch. xxix. p. 323. ed. quarto.

which Mahomet puts the objection (unless a sign, &c.) into the mouth of the unbeliever, in not one of which does he allege a miracle in reply. His answer is, 'that God giveth the power of working miracles, when and to whom he pleaseth;'\* 'that if he should work miracles, they would not believe;† 'that they had before rejected Moses, and the Prophets, who wrought miracles;‡ 'that the Koran itself was a miracle.§

The only place in the Koran in which it can be pretended that a sensible miracle is referred to (for I do not allow the secret visitations of Gabriel, the night journey of Mahomet to heaven, or the presence in battle of invisible hosts of angels, to deserve the name of *sensible* miracles), is the beginning of the fifty-fourth chapter. The words are these:—'The hour of judgment approacheth, *and the moon hath been split in sunder*; but if the unbelievers see a sign, they turn aside, saying, This is a powerful charm.' The Mahometan expositors disagree in their interpretation of this passage; some explaining it to be a mention of the splitting of the moon, as one of the future signs of the approach of the day of judgment; others referring it to a miraculous appearance which had then taken place.¶ It seems to me not improbable, that Mahomet might have taken advantage of some extraordinary halo, or other unusual appearance of the moon, which had happened about this time; and which supplied a foundation both for this passage, and for the story which in after times had been raised out of it.

After this more than silence, after these authentic *confessions* of the Koran, we are not to be moved with miraculous stories related of Mahomet by Abulfeda, who wrote his life, about six hundred years after his death; or which are found in the legend of Al-Jan-nabi, who came two hundred years later.¶ On the contrary, from comparing what Mahomet himself wrote and said, with what was afterward reported of him by his followers, the plain and fair conclusion is, that when the religion was established by conquest, then, and not till then, came out the stories of his miracles.

Now this difference alone constitutes, in my opinion, a bar to all reasoning from one case to the other. The success of a religion founded upon a miraculous history, shows the credit which was given to the history; and this credit, under the circumstances in which it was given, *i. e.* by persons capable of knowing the truth, and interested to inquire after it, is evidence of the reality of the history, and, by consequence, of the truth of the religion. Where a miraculous history is not alleged, no part of this argument can be applied. We admit, that multitudes acknowledge the pretensions

\* Sale's Koran, ch. v. x. xiii. twice.

† Ch. vi.

‡ Ch. iii. xxi. xxviii.

§ Ch. xvi.

¶ Vide Sale, in loc.

¶ It does not, I think, appear that these historians had any written accounts to appeal to, more ancient than the *Sonnah*, which was a collection of traditions made by order of the caliphs two hundred years after Mahomet's death. Mahomet died A. D. 632; Al-Bochari, one of the six doctors who compiled the *Sonnah*, was born A. D. 809; died in 869. *Pri-deaux's Life of Mahomet*, p. 192. ed. 7th.

of Mahomet; but, these pretensions being destitute of miraculous evidence, we know that the grounds upon which they were acknowledged, could not be secure grounds of persuasion to his followers, nor their example any authority to us. Admit the whole of Mahomet's authentic history, so far as it was of a nature capable of being known or witnessed by others, to be true (which is certainly to admit all that the reception of the religion can be brought to prove), and Mahomet might still be an impostor, or enthusiast, or a union of both. Admit to be true almost any part of Christ's history, of that, I mean, which was public, and within the cognizance of his followers, and he must have come from God. Where matter of fact is not in question, where miracles are not alleged, I do not see that the progress of a religion is a better argument of its truth, than the prevalency of any system of opinions in natural religion, morality, or physics, is a proof of the truth of those opinions. And we know that this sort of argument is inadmissible in any branch of philosophy whatever.

But it will be said, If one religion could make its way without miracles, why might not another? To which I reply, first, that this is not the question; the proper question is not, whether a religious institution could be set up without miracles, but whether a religion or a change of religion, founding itself in miracles, could succeed without any reality to rest upon? I apprehend these two cases to be very different; and I apprehend Mahomet's not taking this course, to be one proof, amongst others, that the thing is difficult, if not impossible, to be accomplished: certainly it was not from an unconsciousness of the value and importance of miraculous evidence: for it is very observable, that in the same volume, and sometimes in the same chapters, in which Mahomet so repeatedly disclaims the power of working miracles himself, he is incessantly referring to the miracles of preceding prophets. One would imagine, to hear some men talk, or to read some books, that the setting up of a religion by dint of miraculous pretences was a thing of every day's experience; whereas, I believe, that, except the Jewish and Christian religion, there is no tolerably well-authenticated account of any such thing having been accomplished.

II. The establishment of Mahomet's religion was effected by causes which in no degree appertained to the origin of Christianity.

During the first twelve years of his mission, Mahomet had recourse only to persuasion. This is allowed. And there is sufficient reason from the effect to believe, that, if he had confined himself to this mode of propagating his religion, we of the present day should never have heard either of him or it. 'Three years were silently employed in the conversion of *fourteen* proselytes. For ten years, the religion advanced with a slow and painful progress, within the walls of Mecca. The number of proselytes in the seventh year of his mission may be estimated by the absence of *eighty-three* men and *eighteen* women, who retired to Ethiopia.\* Yet this progress, such as

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\* Gibbon's Hist. vol. ix. p. 244, &c.; ed. Dub.

it was, appears to have been aided by some very important advantages which Mahomet found in his situation, in his mode of conducting his design, and in his doctrine.

1. Mahomet was the grandson of the most powerful and honorable family in Mecca: and although the early death of his father had not left him a patrimony suitable to his birth, he had, long before the commencement of his mission, repaired this deficiency by an opulent marriage. A person considerable by his wealth, of high descent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, taking upon himself the character of a religious teacher, would not fail of attracting attention and followers.

2. Mahomet conducted his design, in the outset especially, with great art and prudence. He conducted it as a politician would conduct a plot. His first application was to his own family. This gained him his wife's uncle, a considerable person in Mecca, together with his cousin Ali, afterward the celebrated Caliph, then a youth of great expectation, and even already distinguished by his attachment, impetuosity, and courage.\* He next expressed himself to Abu Becr, a man amongst the first of the Koreish in wealth and influence. The interest and example of Abu Becr, drew in five other principal persons in Mecca; whose solicitations prevailed upon five more of the same rank. This was the work of three years; during which time, every thing was transacted in secret. Upon the strength of these allies, and under the powerful protection of his family, who, however some of them might disapprove his enterprise, or deride his pretensions, would not suffer the orphan of their house, the relic of their favorite brother, to be insulted; Mahomet now commenced his public preaching. And the advance which he made during the nine or ten remaining years of his peaceable ministry, was by no means greater than what, with these advantages, and with the additional and singular circumstance of there being no *established* religion at Mecca at that time to contend with, might reasonably have been expected. How soon his primitive adherents were let into the secret of his views of empire, or in what stage of his undertaking these views first opened themselves to his own mind, it is not now so easy to determine. The event however was, that these his first proselytes all ultimately attained to riches and honors, to the command of armies, and the government of kingdoms.†

3. The Arabs deduced their descent from Abraham through the line of Ishmael. The inhabitants of Mecca, in common probably with the other Arabian tribes, acknowledged, as, I think, may clearly be collected from the Koran, one supreme Deity, but had associated with him many objects of idolatrous worship. The great

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\* Of which Mr. Gibbon has preserved the following specimen:—'When Mahomet called out in an assembly of his family, Who among you will be my companion and my vizir? Ali, then only in the fourteenth year of his age, suddenly replied, O prophet! I am the man;—whosoever rises against thee, I will dash out his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O prophet! I will be thy vizir over them.' Vol. ix. p. 245.  
 † Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 244.



doctrine with which Mahomet set out, was the strict and exclusive unity of God. Abraham, he told them, their illustrious ancestor; Ishmael, the father of their nation; Moses, the lawgiver of the Jews; and Jesus, the author of Christianity; had all asserted the same thing; that their followers had universally corrupted the truth, and that *he* was now commissioned to restore it to the world. Was it to be wondered at, that a doctrine so specious, and authorized by names, some or other of which were holden in the highest veneration by every description of his hearers, should, in the hands of a popular missionary, prevail to the extent to which Mahomet succeeded by his pacific ministry?

4. Of the institution which Mahomet joined with this fundamental doctrine, and of the Koran in which that institution is delivered, we discover, I think, two purposes that pervade the whole, *viz.* to make converts, and to make his converts soldiers. The following particulars, amongst others, may be considered as pretty evident indications of these designs:

1. When Mahomet began to preach, his address to the Jews, to the Christians, and to the Pagan Arabs, was, that the religion which he taught, was no other than what had been originally their own.—‘We believe in God, and that which hath been sent down unto us, and that which hath been sent down unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the Tribes, and that which was delivered unto Moses and Jesus, and that which was delivered unto the prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between any of them.’\* ‘He hath ordained you the religion which he commanded Noah, and which we have revealed unto thee, O Mohammed, and which we commanded Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, saying, Observe this religion, and be not divided therein.’† ‘He hath chosen you, and hath not imposed on you any difficulty in the religion which he hath given you, the religion of your father Abraham.’‡

2. The author of the Koran never ceases from describing the future anguish of unbelievers, their despair, regret, penitence, and torment. It is the point which he labors above all others. And these descriptions are conceived in terms which will appear in no small degree impressive, even to the modern reader of an English translation. Doubtless they would operate with much greater force upon the minds of those to whom they were immediately directed. The terror which they seem well calculated to inspire, would be to many tempers a powerful application.

3. On the other hand; his voluptuous paradise; his robes of silk, his palaces of marble, his rivers and shades, his groves and couches, his wines, his dainties; and above all, his seventy-two virgins assigned to each of the faithful, of resplendent beauty and eternal youth; intoxicated the imaginations, and seized the passions of his Eastern followers.

4. But Mahomet’s highest heaven was reserved for those who

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\* Sale’s Koran, c. ii. p. 17    † Ib. c. xlii. p. 393.    ‡ Ib. c. xxii. p. 281.

fought his battles, or expended their fortunes in his cause.—‘Those believers who still sit at home, not having any hurt; and those who employ their fortunes and their persons for the religion of God, shall not be held equal. God hath preferred those who employ their fortunes and their persons in that cause, to a degree above those who sit at home. God had indeed promised every one Paradise; but God had preferred those who *fight for the faith* before those who sit still, by adding unto them a great reward; by degree of honor conferred upon them from him, and by granting them forgiveness and mercy.’\* Again; ‘Do ye reckon the giving drink to the pilgrims, and the visiting of the holy temple, to be actions as meritorious as those performed by him who believeth in God and the last day, and *fighteth for the religion of God*? They shall not be held equal with God.—They who have believed and fled their country, and employed their substance and their persons in the defence of God’s true religion, shall be in the highest degree of honor with God; and these are they who shall be happy. The Lord sendeth them good tidings of mercy from him, and good will, and of gardens wherein they shall enjoy lasting pleasures. They shall continue therein for ever; for with God is a great reward.’† And once more; ‘Verily God hath purchased of the true believers their souls and their substance, promising them the enjoyment of Paradise, on condition that they *fight for the cause of God*; whether they slay or be slain, the promise for the same is assuredly due by the Law and the Gospel and the Koran.’‡ §

5. His doctrine of predestination was applicable, and was applied by him, to the same purpose of fortifying and of exalting the courage of his adherents.—‘If any thing of the matter had happened unto us, we had not been slain here.’ Answer: If ye had been in your houses, verily they would have gone forth to fight, whose slaughter was decreed to the places where they died.’||

6. In warm regions, the appetite of the sexes is ardent, the passion for inebriating liquors moderate. In compliance with this distinction, although Mahomet laid a restraint upon the drinking of wine, in the use of women he allowed an almost unbounded indulgence. Four wives, with the liberty of changing them at pleasure,¶ together with the persons of all his captives,\*\* was an irresistible bribe to an Arabian warrior. ‘God is minded, (says he, speaking of this very subject) to make his religion light unto you; for man was created weak.’ How different this from the unaccommodating purity of the Gospel! How would Mahomet have succeeded with

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\* Sale’s Koran, c. iv. p. 73. † Ib. c. ix. p. 151. ‡ Ib. c. ix. p. 164.

§ ‘The sword (saith Mahomet) is the key of heaven and of hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of God, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months’ fasting or prayer. Whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven at the day of judgment; his wounds shall be resplendent as vermilion, and odoriferous as musk; and the loss of his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubims.’ Gibbon, vol. ix. 256.

¶ Sale’s Koran, c. iii. p. 54. ¶ Ib. c. iv. p. 63. \*\* Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 223.

the Christian lesson in his mouth,—‘Whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart?’ It must be added, that Mahomet did not enter upon the prohibition of wine, till the fourth year of the Hegira, or seventeenth of his mission,\* when his military successes had completely established his authority. The same observation holds of the fast of the Ramadan,† and of the most laborious part of his institution, the pilgrimage to Mecca.‡

What has hitherto been collected from the records of the Mussulman history, relates to the twelve or thirteen years of Mahomet's peaceable preaching; which part alone of his life and enterprise admits of the smallest comparison with the origin of Christianity. A new scene is now unfolded. The city of Medina, distant about ten days' journey from Mecca, was at that time distracted by the hereditary contentions of two hostile tribes. These feuds were exasperated by the mutual persecutions of the Jews and Christians, and of the different Christian sects by which the city was inhabited.§ The religion of Mahomet presented, in some measure, a point of union or compromise to these divided opinions. It embraced the principles which were common to them all. Each party saw in it an honorable acknowledgment of the fundamental truth of their own system. To the Pagan Arab, somewhat imbued with the sentiments and knowledge of his Jewish or Christian fellow-citizen, it offered no offensive, or very improbable theology. This recommendation procured to Mohometanism a more favorable reception at Medina, than its author had been able, by twelve years' painful endeavors, to obtain for it at Mecca. Yet, after all, the progress of the religion was inconsiderable. His missionary could only collect a congregation of forty persons.|| It was not a religious, but a political association, which ultimately introduced Mahomet into Medina. Harassed as it should seem, and disgusted by the long continuance of factions and disputes, the inhabitants of that city saw in the admission of the prophet's authority, a rest from the miseries which they had suffered, and a suppression of the violence and fury which they had learned to condemn. After an embassy, therefore, composed of believers and unbelievers,¶ and of persons of both tribes, with whom a treaty was concluded of strict alliance and support, Mahomet made his public entry, and was received as the sovereign of Medina.

From this time, or soon after this time, the impostor changed his language and his conduct. Having now a town at his command, where to arm his party, and to head them with security, he enters upon new counsels. He now pretends that a divine commission is given him to attack the infidels, to destroy idolatry, and to set up the

\* Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 126.

† Ib. p. 112.

‡ This latter, however, already prevailed amongst the Arabs, and had grown out of their excessive veneration for the Caaba. Mahomet's law, in this respect, was rather a compliance than an innovation.—Sale's Prelim. Disc. p. 122.

§ Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 100.

|| Ib. p. 85.

¶ Ibid.

true faith by the sword.\* An early victory over a very superior force, achieved by conduct and bravery, established the renown of his arms, and of his personal character.† Every year after this was marked by battles or assassinations. The nature and activity of Mahomet's future exertions may be estimated from the computation, that, in the nine following years of his life, he commanded his army in person in eight general engagements,‡ and undertook, by himself or his lieutenants, fifty military enterprises.

From this time we have nothing left to account for, but that Mahomet should collect an army, that his army should conquer, and that his religion should proceed together with his conquests. The ordinary experience of human affairs, leaves us little to wonder at, in any of these effects: and they were likewise each assisted by peculiar facilities. From all sides, the roving Arabs crowded round the standard of religion and plunder, of freedom and victory, of arms and rapine. Besides the highly painted joys of a carnal paradise, Mahomet rewarded his followers in this world with a liberal division of the spoils, and with the persons of their female captives.§ The condition of Arabia, occupied by small independent tribes, exposed it to the impression, and yielded to the progress, of a firm and resolute army. After the reduction of his native peninsula, the weakness also of the Roman provinces on the north and the west, as well as the distracted state of the Persian empire on the east, facilitated the successful invasion of neighboring countries. That Mahomet's conquests should carry his religion along with them, will excite little surprise, when we know the conditions which he proposed to the vanquished. Death or conversion was the only choice offered to idolaters. 'Strike off their heads! strike off all the ends of their fingers!|| kill the idolaters wheresoever ye shall find them!¶' To the Jews and Christians was left the somewhat milder alternative of subjection and tribute, if they persisted in their own religion, or of an equal participation in the rights and liberties, the honors and privileges, of the faithful, if they embraced the religion of their conquerors. 'Ye Christian dogs, you know your option, the Koran, the tribute, or the sword.'\*\* The corrupted state of Christianity in the seventh century, and the contentions of its sects, unhappily so fell in with men's care of their safety, or their fortunes, as to induce many to forsake its profession. Add to all which, that Mahomet's victories not only operated by the natural effect of conquest, but that they were constantly represented, both to his friends and enemies, as divine declarations in his favor. Success was evidence. Prosperity carried with it, not only influence, but proof. 'Ye have already (says he, after the battle of Bedr) had a miracle shown you, in two armies which attacked each other; one army fought for God's true religion, but the other were infidels.††

\* Mod Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 88.

† Mod. Univ. Hist. vol. i. p. 255.

‡ Sale's Koran, c. viii. p. 140.

\*\* Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 337.

† Vict. of Bedr, ib. p. 106.

§ Gibbon, vol. ix. p. 255.

¶ Ib. c. ix. p. 149.

†† Sale's Koran, c. iii. p. 36.

Again; 'Ye slew not those who were slain at Bedr, but God slew them.—If ye desire a decision of the matter between us, now hath a decision come unto you.'\*

Many more passages might be collected out of the Koran to the same effect. But they are unnecessary. The success of Mahometanism during this, and indeed, every future period of its history, bears so little resemblance to the early propagation of Christianity, that no inference whatever can justly be drawn from it to the prejudice of the Christian argument. For, what are we comparing? A Galilean peasant accompanied by a few fishermen, with a conqueror at the head of his army. We compare Jesus, without force, without power, without support, without one external circumstance of attraction or influence, prevailing against the prejudices, the learning, the hierarchy, of his country; against the ancient religious opinions, the pompous religious rites, the philosophy, the wisdom, the authority of the Roman empire, in the most polished and enlightened period of its existence; with Mahomet making his way amongst Arabs; collecting followers in the midst of conquests and triumphs, in the darkest ages and countries of the world, and when success in arms not only operated by that command of men's wills and persons which attends prosperous undertakings, but was considered as a sure testimony of divine approbation. That multitudes, persuaded by this argument, should join the train of a victorious chief; that still greater multitudes should, without any argument, bow down before irresistible power; is a conduct in which we cannot see much to surprise us; in which we can see nothing that resembles the causes by which the establishment of Christianity was effected.

The success, therefore, of Mahometanism, stands not in the way of this important conclusion; that the propagation of Christianity, in the manner and under the circumstances in which it was propagated, is a *unique* in the history of the species. A Jewish peasant overthrew the religion of the world.

I have, nevertheless, placed the prevalency of the religion amongst the auxiliary arguments of its truth; because, whether it had prevailed or not, or whether its prevalency can or cannot be accounted for, the direct argument remains still. It is still true that a great number of men upon the spot, personally connected with the history and with the author of the religion, were induced by what they heard, and saw, and knew, not only to change their former opinions, but to give up their time, and sacrifice their ease, to traverse seas and kingdoms without rest and without weariness, to commit themselves to extreme dangers, to undertake incessant toils, to undergo grievous sufferings, and all this, solely in consequence, and in support, of their belief of facts, which, if true, establish the truth of the religion, which, if false, they must have known to be so.

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\* Sale's Koran, c. viii. p. 141.

## PART III.

## A BRIEF CONSIDERATION OF SOME POPULAR OBJECTIONS.

## CHAP. I.

*The Discrepancies between the several Gospels.*

I KNOW not a more rash or unphilosophical conduct of the understanding, than to reject the substance of a story, by reason of some diversity in the circumstances with which it is related. The usual character of human testimony is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. This is what the daily experience of courts of justice teaches. When accounts of a transaction come from the mouths of different witnesses, it is seldom that it is not possible to pick out apparent or real inconsistencies between them. These inconsistencies are studiously displayed by an adverse pleader, but oftentimes with little impression upon the minds of the judges. On the contrary, a close and minute agreement induces the suspicion of confederacy and fraud. When written histories touch upon the same scenes of action, the comparison almost always affords ground for a like reflection. Numerous, and sometimes important, variations present themselves; not seldom also, absolute and final contradictions; yet neither one nor the other, are deemed sufficient to shake the credibility of the main fact. The embassy of the Jews to deprecate the execution of Claudian's order to place his statue in their temple, Philo places in harvest, Josephus in seed-time; both contemporary writers. No reader is led by this inconsistency to doubt, whether such an embassy was sent, or whether such an order was given. Our own history supplies examples of the same kind. In the account of the Marquis of Argyll's death, in the reign of Charles the Second, we have a very remarkable contradiction. Lord Clarendon relates that he was condemned to be hanged, which was performed the same day; on the contrary, Burnet, Woodrow, Heath, Echard, concur in stating that he was beheaded; and that he was condemned upon the Saturday, and executed upon the Monday.\* Was any reader of English history ever sceptic enough to raise from hence a question, whether the Marquis of Argyll was executed or not? Yet this ought to be left in uncertainty, according to the principles upon which the Christian history has sometimes been attacked. Dr. Middleton contended, that the different hours of the day assigned to the crucifixion of Christ, by John and by the other evangelists, did not admit of the reconciliation which learned men had proposed; and then concludes the discussion with this hard

\* See Biog. Britann.

remark: 'We must be forced, with several of the critics, to leave the difficulty just as we found it, chargeable with all the consequences of manifest inconsistency.\*' But what are these consequences? By no means the discrediting of the history as to the principal fact, by a repugnancy (even supposing that repugnancy not to be resolvable into different modes of computation) in the time of the day in which it is said to have taken place.

A great deal of the discrepancy observable in the Gospels, arises from *omission*; from a fact or a passage of Christ's life being noticed by one writer, which is unnoticed by another. Now, omission is at all times a very uncertain ground of objection. We perceive it, not only in the comparison of different writers, but even in the same writer when compared with himself. There are a great many particulars, and some of them of importance, mentioned by Josephus in his *Antiquities*, which, as we should have supposed, ought to have been put down by him in their place in the Jewish Wars.† Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio Cassius, have, all three, written of the reign of Tiberius. Each has mentioned many things omitted by the rest,‡ yet no objection is from thence taken to the respective credit of their histories. We have in our own times, if there were not something indecorous in the comparison, the life of an eminent person, written by three of his friends, in which there is very great variety in the incidents selected by them; some apparent, and perhaps some real contradictions; yet without any impeachment of the substantial truth of their accounts, of the authenticity of the books, of the competent information or general fidelity of the writers.

But these discrepancies will be still more numerous, when men do not write histories, but *memoirs*; which is perhaps the true name and proper description of our Gospels: that is, when they do not undertake, or ever meant, to deliver, in order of time, a regular and complete account of *all* the things of importance, which the person, who is the subject of their history, did or said; but only, out of many similar ones, to give such passages or such actions and discourses, as offered themselves more immediately to their attention, came in the way of their inquiries, occurred to their recollections, or were suggested by their *particular design* at the time of writing.

This particular design may appear sometimes, but not always, nor often. Thus I think that the particular design which Saint Matthew had in view whilst he was writing the history of the resurrection, was to attest the faithful performance of Christ's promise to his disciples to go before them into Galilee; because he alone, except Mark, who seems to have taken it from him, has recorded this promise, and he alone has confined his narrative to that single appearance to the disciples which fulfilled it. It was the preconcerted, the great and most public manifestation of our Lord's person. It was the thing which dwelt upon Saint Matthew's mind, and he

\* Middleton's *Reflections* answered by Benson: *Hist. Christ.* vol. iii. p. 50.

† Lardner, *Cred.* part i. vol. ii. p. 735, &c.

‡ *Ib.* p. 743.

adapted his narrative to it. But, that there is nothing in Saint Matthew's language, which negatives other appearances, or which imports that this appearance to his disciples in Galilee in pursuance of his promise, was his first or only appearance, is made pretty evident by Saint Mark's Gospel, which uses the same terms concerning the appearance in Galilee as Saint Matthew uses, yet itself records two other appearances prior to this: 'Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him as he said unto you.' (xvi. 7). We might be apt to infer from these words, that this was the *first* time they were to see him: at least, we might infer it, with as much reason as we draw the inference from the same words in Matthew; yet the historian himself did not perceive that he was leading his readers to any such conclusion; for in the twelfth and two following verses of this chapter, he informs us of two appearances, which, by comparing the order of events, are shown to have been prior to the appearance in Galilee. 'He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country: and they went and told it unto the residue, neither believed they them: afterward he appeared unto the eleven, as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief, because they believed not them that had seen him after he was risen.'

Probably the same observation, concerning the *particular design* which guided the historian, may be of use in comparing many other passages of the Gospels.

## CHAP. II.

### *Erroneous Opinions imputed to the Apostles.*

A SPECIES of candor which is shown towards every other book, is sometimes refused to the Scriptures; and that is, the placing of a distinction between judgment and testimony. We do not usually question the credit of a writer, by reason of an opinion he may have delivered upon subjects unconnected with his evidence: and even upon subjects connected with his account, or mixed with it in the same discourse or writing, we naturally separate facts from opinions, testimony from observation, narrative from argument.

To apply this equitable consideration to the Christian records, much controversy and much objection has been raised concerning the quotations of the Old Testament found in the New; some of which quotations, it is said, are applied in a sense, and to events, apparently different from that which they bear, and from those to which they belong, in the original. It is probable to my apprehension, that many of these quotations were intended by the writers of the New Testament as nothing more than *accommodations*. They quoted passages of their Scripture, which suited, and fell in with, the occasion before them, without always undertaking to assert, that the occasion was in the view of the author of the words. Such *accommodations* of passages from old authors, from books especially



which are in every one's hands, are common with writers of all countries; but in none, perhaps, were more to be expected than in the writings of the Jews, whose literature was almost entirely confined to their Scriptures. Those prophecies which are alleged with more solemnity, and which are accompanied with a precise declaration, that they originally respected the event then related, are, I think, truly alleged. But were it otherwise; is the judgment of the writers of the New Testament, in interpreting passages of the Old, or sometimes, perhaps, in receiving established interpretations, so connected either with their veracity, or with their means of information concerning what was passing in their own times, as that a critical mistake, even were it clearly made out, should overthrow their historical credit?—Does it diminish it? Has it any thing to do with it?

Another error imputed to the first Christians, was the expected approach of the day of judgment. I would introduce this objection by a remark upon what appears to me a somewhat similar example. Our Saviour, speaking to Peter of John, said, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?\*' These words, we find, had been so misconstrued, as that a report from thence 'went abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die.' Suppose that this had come down to us amongst the prevailing opinions of the early Christians, and that the particular circumstance, from which the mistake sprang, had been lost (which, humanly speaking, was most likely to have been the case), some, at this day, would have been ready to regard and quote the error, as an impeachment of the whole Christian system. Yet with how little justice such a conclusion would have been drawn, or rather such a presumption taken up, the information which we happen to possess, enables us now to perceive. To those who think that the Scriptures lead us to believe, that the early Christians, and even the apostles, expected the approach of the day of judgment in their own times, the same reflection will occur, as that which we have made with respect to the more partial, perhaps, and temporary, but still no less ancient error, concerning the duration of St. John's life. It was an error, it may be likewise said, which would effectually hinder those who entertained it from acting the part of impostors.

The difficulty which attends the subject of the present chapter, is contained in this question; If we once admit the fallibility of the apostolic judgment, where are we to stop, or in what can we rely upon it? To which question, as arguing with unbelievers, and as arguing for the substantial truth of the Christian history, and for that alone, it is competent to the advocate of Christianity to reply, Give me the apostles' testimony, and I do not stand in need of their judgment; give me the facts, and I have complete security for every conclusion I want.

But, although I think that it is competent to the Christian apologist to return this answer; I do not think that is the only answer

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\* John xxi. 22.

which the objection is capable of receiving. The two following cautions, founded, I apprehend, in the most reasonable distinctions, will exclude all uncertainty upon this head which can be attended with danger.

First, to separate what was the object of the apostolic mission, and declared by them to be so, from what was extraneous to it, or only incidentally connected with it. Of points clearly extraneous to the religion, nothing need be said. Of points incidentally connected with it, something may be added. Demoniacal possession is one of these points: concerning the reality of which, as this place will not admit the examination, or even the production of the argument on either side of the question, it would be arrogance in me, to deliver any judgment. And it is unnecessary. For what I am concerned to observe is, that even they who think it was a general, but erroneous opinion, of those times; and that the writers of the New Testament, in common with other Jewish writers of that age, fell into the manner of speaking and of thinking upon the subject, which then universally prevailed, need not be alarmed by the concession, as though they had any thing to fear from it, for the truth of Christianity. The doctrine was not what Christ brought into the world. It appears in the Christian records, incidentally and accidentally, as being the subsisting opinion of the age and country in which his ministry was exercised. It was no part of the object of *his* revelation, to regulate other men's opinions concerning the action of spiritual substances upon animal bodies. At any rate, it is unconnected with testimony. If a dumb person was by a word restored to the use of his speech, it signifies little to what cause the dumbness was ascribed; and the like of every other cure wrought upon those who are said to have been possessed. The malady was real, the cure was real, whether the popular explication of the cause was well founded, or not. The matter of fact, the change, so far as it was an object of sense, or of testimony, was in either case the same.

Secondly, that, in reading the apostolic writings, we distinguish between their doctrines and their arguments. Their doctrines came to them by revelation properly so called; yet in propounding these doctrines in their writings or discourses, they were wont to illustrate, support, and enforce them, by such analogies, arguments, and considerations, as their own thoughts suggested. Thus the call of the Gentiles, that is, the admission of the Gentiles to the Christian profession without a previous subjection to the law of Moses, was imparted to the apostles by revelation, and was attested by the miracles which attended the Christian ministry among them. The apostles' own assurance of the matter rested upon this foundation. Nevertheless, Saint Paul, when treating of the subject, offers a great variety of topics in its proof and vindication. The doctrine itself must be received: but it is not necessary, in order to defend Christianity, to defend the propriety of every comparison, or the validity of every argument, which the apostle has brought into the discussion. The same observation applies to some other instances; and is, in my opinion, very well founded; 'When divine writers argue

upon any point, we are always bound to believe the conclusions that their reasonings end in, as parts of divine revelation: but we are not bound to be able to make out, or even to assent to, all the premises made use of by them, in their whole extent, unless it appear plainly, that they affirm the premises as expressly as they do the conclusions proved by them.\*

### CHAP. III.

#### *The Connexion of Christianity with the Jewish History.*

UNDOUBTEDLY our Saviour assumes the divine origin of the Mosaic institution: and, independently of his authority, I conceive it to be very difficult to assign any other cause for the commencement or existence of that institution; especially for the singular circumstance of the Jews' adhering to the unity, when every other people slid into polytheism; for their being men in religion, children in every thing else; behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, superior to the most improved in their sentiments and doctrines relating to the Deity.† Undoubtedly, also, our Saviour recognizes the prophetic character of many of their ancient writers. So far, therefore, we are bound as Christians to go. But to make Christianity answerable with its life, for the circumstantial truth of each separate passage of the Old Testament, the genuineness of every book, the information, fidelity, and judgment, of every writer in it, is to bring, I will not say great, but unnecessary difficulties, into the whole system. These books were universally read and received by the Jews of our Saviour's time. He and his apostles, in common with all other Jews, referred to them, alluded to them, used them. Yet, except where he expressly ascribes a divine authority to particular predictions, I do not know that we can strictly draw any conclusion from the books being so used and applied, beside the proof, which it unquestionably is, of their notoriety, and reception at that time. In this view, our Scriptures afford a valuable testimony

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\* Burnet's Expos. art. 6.

† 'In the doctrine, for example, of the unity, the eternity, the omnipotence, the omniscience, the omnipresence, the wisdom, and the goodness, of God; in their opinions concerning Providence, and the creation, preservation, and government of the world.' Campbell on Mir. p. 207. To which we may add, in the acts of their religion not being accompanied either with cruelties or impurities: in the religion itself being free from a species of superstition which prevailed universally in the popular religions of the ancient world, and which is to be found perhaps in all religions that have their origin in human artifice and credulity, viz. fanciful connexions between certain appearances and actions, and the destiny of nations or individuals. Upon these conceits rested the whole train of auguries and auspices, which formed so much even of the serious part of the religions of Greece and Rome, and of the charms and incantations which were practised in those countries by the common people. From every thing of this sort the religion of the Jews, alone, was free. Vide Priestley's Lectures on the Truth of the Jewish and Christian Revelation, 1794.

to those of the Jews. But the nature of this testimony ought to be understood. It is surely very different from, what it is sometimes represented to be, a specific ratification of each particular fact and opinion; and not only of each particular fact, but of the motives assigned for every action, together with the judgment of praise or dispraise bestowed upon them. Saint James, in his Epistle,\* says, 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.' Notwithstanding this text, the reality of Job's history, and even the existence of such a person, has been always deemed a fair subject of inquiry and discussion amongst Christian divines. Saint James's authority is considered as good evidence of the existence of the book of Job at that time, and of its reception by the Jews; and of nothing more. Saint Paul, in his second Epistle to Timothy,† has this similitude: 'Now, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth.' These names are not found in the Old Testament. And it is uncertain, whether Saint Paul took them from some apocryphal writing then extant, or from tradition. But no one ever imagined, that Saint Paul is here asserting the authority of the writing, if it was a written account which he quoted, or making himself answerable for the authenticity of the tradition; much less, that he so involves himself with either of these questions, as that the credit of his own history and mission should depend upon the fact, whether Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, or not. For what reason a more rigorous interpretation should be put upon other references, it is difficult to know. I do not mean, that other passages of the Jewish history stand upon no better evidence than the history of Job, or of Jannes and Jambres (I think much otherwise); but I mean, that a reference in the New Testament, to a passage in the Old, does not so fix its authority, as to exclude all inquiry into its credibility, or into the separate reasons upon which that credibility is founded: and that it is an unwarrantable, as well as an unsafe rule to lay down concerning the Jewish history, what was never laid down concerning any other, that either every particular of it must be true, or the whole false.

I have thought it necessary to state this point explicitly, because a fashion, revived by Voltaire, and pursued by the disciples of his school, seems to have much prevailed of late, of attacking Christianity through the sides of Judaism. Some objections of this class are founded in misconstruction, some in exaggeration; but all proceed upon a supposition, which has not been made out by argument, *viz.* that the attestation, which the Author and first teachers of Christianity gave to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets, extends to every point and portion of the Jewish history; and so extends as to make Christianity responsible in its own credibility, for the circumstantial truth (I had almost said for the critical exactness) of every narrative contained in the Old Testament.

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\* Chap. v. 11.

† Chap. iii. 8.

## CHAP. IV.

*Rejection of Christianity.*

WE acknowledge that the Christian religion, although it converted great numbers, did not produce a universal, or even a general, conviction in the minds of men, of the age and countries in which it appeared. And this want of a more complete and extensive success, is called the *rejection* of the Christian history and miracles; and has been thought by some to form a strong objection to the reality of the facts which the history contains.

The matter of the objection divides itself into two parts; as it relates to the Jews, and as it relates to Heathen nations: because the minds of these two descriptions of men may have been, with respect to Christianity, under the influence of very different causes. The case of the Jews, inasmuch as our Saviour's ministry was originally addressed to them, offers itself first to our consideration.

'Now, upon the subject of the truth of the Christian religion; with *us*, there is but one question, *viz.* whether the miracles were actually wrought? From acknowledging the miracles, we pass instantaneously to the acknowledgment of the whole. No doubt lies between the premises and the conclusion. If we believe the works, or any one of them, we believe in Jesus. And this order of reasoning is become so universal and familiar, that we do not readily apprehend how it could ever have been otherwise. Yet it appears to me perfectly certain, that the state of thought, in the mind of a Jew of our Saviour's age, was totally different from this. After allowing the reality of the miracle, he had a great deal to do to persuade himself that Jesus was the Messiah. This is clearly intimated by various passages of the Gospel history. It appears that, in the apprehension of the writers of the New Testament, the miracles did not irresistibly carry, even those who saw them, to the conclusion intended to be drawn from them; or so compel assent, as to leave no room for suspense, for the exercise of candor, or the effects of prejudice. And to this point, at least, the evangelists may be allowed to be good witnesses; because it is a point in which exaggeration or disguise would have been the other way. Their accounts, if they could be suspected of falsehood, would rather have magnified, than diminished, the effects of the miracles.

John vii. 21—31. 'Jesus answered, and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel.—If a man on the sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing to him: do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? *Howbeit we know this man, whence he is, but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.* Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is

true, whom ye know not. But I know him, for I am from him, and he hath sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. *And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than those which this man hath done?*

This passage is very observable. It exhibits the reasoning of different sorts of persons upon the occasion of a miracle, which persons of all sorts are represented to have acknowledged as real. One sort of men thought, that there was something very extraordinary in all this; but that still Jesus could not be the Christ, because there was a circumstance in his appearance which militated with an opinion concerning Christ, in which they had been brought up, and of the truth of which, it is probable, they had never entertained a particle of doubt, *viz.* that 'When Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.' Another sort were inclined to believe him to be the Messiah. But even these did not argue as we should; did not consider the miracle as of itself decisive of the question; as what, if once allowed, excluded all farther debate upon the subject; but founded their opinion upon a kind of comparative reasoning, 'When Christ cometh, will he do *more* miracles than those which this man hath done?'

Another passage in the same evangelist, and observable for the same purpose, is that in which he relates the resurrection of Lazarus: 'Jesus,' he tells us (xi. 43; 44), 'when he had thus spoken, cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth: and he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go.' One might have suspected, that at least all those who stood by the sepulchre, when Lazarus was raised, would have believed in Jesus. Yet the evangelist does not so represent it:—'Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him; but *some of them* went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.' We cannot suppose that the evangelist meant by this account, to leave his readers to imagine, that any of the spectators doubted about the truth of the miracle. Far from it. Unquestionably he states the miracle to have been fully allowed: yet the persons who allowed it, were, according to his representation, capable of retaining hostile sentiments towards Jesus. 'Believing in Jesus' was not only to believe that he wrought miracles, but that he was the Messiah. With us there is no difference between these two things: with them, there was the greatest; and the difference is apparent in this transaction. If Saint John has represented the conduct of the Jews upon this occasion truly (and why he should not I cannot tell, for it rather makes against him than for him), it shows clearly the principles upon which their judgment proceeded. Whether he has related the matter truly or not, the relation itself discovers the writer's own opinion of those principles: and that alone possesses considerable authority. In the next chapter, we have a reflection of the evangelist, entirely suited to this state of the case: 'but

though he had done so many miracles before them, yet believed they not on him.\* The evangelist does not mean to impute the defect of their belief to any doubt about the miracles; but to their not perceiving, what all now sufficiently perceive, and what they would have perceived, had not their understandings been governed by strong prejudices, the infallible attestation which the works of Jesus bore to the truth of his pretensions.

The ninth chapter of Saint John's Gospel contains a very circumstantial account of the cure of a blind man: a miracle submitted to all the scrutiny and examination which a sceptic could propose. If a modern unbeliever had drawn up the interrogatories, they could hardly have been more critical or searching. The account contains also a very curious conference between the Jewish rulers and the patient, in which the point for our present notice is their resistance of the force of the miracle, and of the conclusion to which it led, after they had failed in discrediting its evidence. 'We know that God spake unto Moses; but as for this fellow, we know not whence he is.' That was the answer which set their minds at rest. And by the help of much prejudice, and great unwillingness to yield, it might do so. In the mind of the poor man restored to sight, which was under no such bias, and felt no such reluctance, the miracle had its natural operation. 'Herein,' says he, 'is a marvellous thing that ye know not from whence he is, yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know, that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began, was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.' We do not find, that the Jewish rulers had any other reply to make to this defence, than that which authority is sometimes apt to make to argument, 'Dost thou teach us?'

If it shall be inquired, how a turn of thought, so different from what prevails at present, should obtain currency with the ancient Jews; the answer is found in two opinions which are proved to have subsisted in that age and country. The one was, their expectation of a Messiah of a kind totally contrary to what the appearance of Jesus bespoke him to be; the other, their persuasion of the agency of demons in the production of supernatural effects. These opinions are not *supposed* by us for the purpose of argument, but are evidently recognized in Jewish writings, as well as in ours. And it ought moreover to be considered, that in these opinions the Jews of that age had been from their infancy brought up; that they were opinions, the grounds of which they had probably few of them inquired into, and of the truth of which they entertained no doubt. And I think that these two opinions conjointly afford an explanation of their conduct. The first put them upon seeking out some excuse to themselves for not receiving Jesus in the character in which he claimed to be received; and the second supplied them with just such an excuse as they wanted. Let Jesus work what miracles he

would; still the answer was in readiness, 'that he wrought them by the assistance of Beelzebub.' And to this answer no reply could be made, but that which our Saviour did make, by showing that the tendency of his mission was so adverse to the views with which this being was, by the objectors themselves, supposed to act, that it could not reasonably be supposed that he would assist in carrying it on. The power displayed in the miracles did not alone refute the Jewish solution, because the interposition of invisible agents being once admitted, it is impossible to ascertain the limits by which their efficiency is circumscribed. We of this day may be disposed, possibly, to think such opinions too absurd to have been ever seriously entertained. I am not bound to contend for the credibility of the opinions. They were at least as reasonable as the belief in witchcraft. They were opinions in which the Jews of that age had from their infancy been instructed; and those who cannot see enough in the force of this reason, to account for their conduct towards our Saviour, do not sufficiently consider how such opinions may sometimes become very general in a country, and with what pertinacity, when once become so, they are, for that reason alone, adhered to. In the suspense which these notions, and the prejudices resulting from them, might occasion, the candid and docile and humble-minded would probably decide in Christ's favor; the proud and obstinate, together with the giddy and the thoughtless, almost universally against him.

This state of opinion discovers to us also the reason of what some choose to wonder at, why the Jews should reject miracles when they saw them, yet rely so much upon the tradition of them in their own history. It does not appear that it had ever entered into the minds of those who lived in the time of Moses and the prophets, to ascribe *their* miracles to the supernatural agency of evil beings. The solution was not then invented. The authority of Moses and the prophets being established, and become the foundation of the national polity and religion, it was not probable that the later Jews, brought up in a reverence for that religion, and the subjects of that polity, should apply to their history a reasoning which tended to overthrow the foundation of both.

II. The infidelity of the Gentile world, and that more especially of men of rank and learning in it, is resolved into a principle which, in my judgment, will account for the inefficacy of any argument, or any evidence whatever, *viz.* contempt prior to examination. The state of religion amongst the Greeks and Romans, had a natural tendency to induce this disposition. Dionysius Halicarnassensis remarks, that there were six hundred different kinds of religions or sacred rites exercised at Rome.\* The superior classes of the community treated them all as fables. Can we wonder then, that Christianity was included in the number, without inquiry into its separate merits, or the particular grounds of its pretensions? It might be either true or false for any thing they knew about it. The religion

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\* Jortin's Remarks on Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 371.



had nothing in its character which immediately engaged their notice. It mixed with no politics. It produced no fine writers. It contained no curious speculations. When it did reach their knowledge, I doubt not but that it appeared to them a very strange system,—so unphilosophical,—dealing so little in argument and discussion, in such arguments however and discussions as they were accustomed to entertain. What is said of Jesus Christ, of his nature, office, and ministry, would be in the highest degree alien from the conceptions of their theology. The Redeemer and the destined Judge of the human race, a poor young man, executed at Jerusalem with two thieves upon a cross! Still more would the language in which the Christian doctrine was delivered, be dissonant and barbarous to their ears. What knew they of grace, of redemption, of justification, of the blood of Christ shed for the sins of men, of reconciliation, of mediation? Christianity was made up of points they had never thought of; of terms which they had never heard.

It was presented also to the imagination of the learned Heathen under additional disadvantage, by reason of its real, and still more of its nominal, connexion with Judaism. It shared in the obloquy and ridicule with which that people and their religion were treated by the Greeks and Romans. They regarded Jehovah himself only as the idol of the Jewish nation, and what was related of him, as of a piece with what was told of the tutelar deities of other countries: nay, the Jews were in a particular manner ridiculed for being a credulous race; so that whatever reports of a miraculous nature came out of that country, were looked upon by the Heathen world as false and frivolous. When they heard of Christianity, they heard of it as a quarrel amongst this people, about some articles of their own superstition. Despising, therefore, as they did, the whole system, it was not probable that they would enter, with any degree of seriousness or attention, into the detail of its disputes, or the merits of either side. How little they knew, and with what carelessness they judged, of these matters, appears, I think, pretty plainly from an example of no less weight than that of Tacitus, who, in a grave and professed discourse upon the history of the Jews, states, that they worshipped the effigy of an ass.\* The passage is a proof, how prone the learned men of those times were, and upon how little evidence, to heap together stories which might increase the contempt and odium in which that people was holden. The same foolish charge is also confidently repeated by Plutarch.†

It is observable, that all these considerations are of a nature to operate with the greatest force upon the highest ranks; upon men of education, and that order of the public from which *writers* are principally taken: I may add also, upon the philosophical as well as the libertine character; upon the Antonines or Julian, not less than upon Nero or Domitian; and more particularly, upon that large and polished class of men, who acquiesced in the general persuasion, that all they had to do was to practise the duties of morality, and to

\* Tacit. Hist. lib. v. c. 2.

† Sympos. lib. iv. quest. 5.

worship the Deity *more patrio*; a habit of thinking, liberal as it may appear, which shuts the door against every argument for a new religion. The considerations above mentioned, would acquire also strength from the prejudice which men of rank and learning universally entertain against any thing that *originates* with the vulgar and illiterate; which prejudice is known to be as obstinate as any prejudice whatever.

Yet Christianity was still making its way: and, amidst so many impediments to its progress, so much difficulty in procuring audience and attention, its actual success is more to be wondered at, than that it should not have universally conquered scorn and indifference, fixed the levity of a voluptuous age, or, through a cloud of adverse prejudications, opened for itself a passage to the hearts and understandings of the scholars of the age.

And the cause, which is here assigned for the rejection of Christianity by men of rank and learning among the Heathens, namely, a strong antecedent contempt, accounts also for their *silence* concerning it. If they had rejected it upon examination, they would have written about it; they would have given their reasons. Whereas, what men repudiate upon the strength of some prefixed persuasion, or from a settled contempt of the subject, of the persons who propose it, or of the manner in which it is proposed, they do not naturally write books about, or notice much in what they write upon other subjects.

The letters of the Younger Pliny furnish an example of the silence, and let us, in some measure, into the cause of it. From his celebrated correspondence with Trajan, we know that the Christian religion prevailed in a very considerable degree in the province over which he presided; that it had excited his attention; that he had inquired into the matter, just so much as a Roman magistrate might be expected to inquire, *viz.* whether the religion contained any opinions dangerous to government; but that of its doctrines, its evidences, or its books, he had not taken the trouble to inform himself with any degree of care or correctness. But although Pliny had viewed Christianity in a nearer position than most of his learned countrymen saw it in; yet he had regarded the whole with such negligence and disdain (farther than as it seemed to concern his administration), that, in more than two hundred and forty letters of his which have come down to us, the subject is never once again mentioned. If, out of this number, the two letters between him and Trajan had been lost; with what confidence would the obscurity of the Christian religion have been argued from Pliny's silence about it, and with how little truth!

The name and character which Tacitus has given to Christianity, '*exitiabilis superstitio*,' (a pernicious superstition), and by which two words he disposes of the whole question of the merits or demerits of the religion, afford a strong proof how little he knew, or concerned himself to know, about the matter. I apprehend that I shall not be contradicted, when I take upon me to assert, that no unbeliever of the present age would apply this epithet to the Christianity

of the New Testament, or not allow that it was entirely unmerited. Read the instructions given by a great teacher of the religion, to those very Roman converts of whom Tacitus speaks; and given also a very few years before the time of which he is speaking; and which are not, let it be observed, a collection of fine sayings brought together from different parts of a large work, but stand in one entire passage of a public letter, without the intermixture of a single thought which is frivolous or exceptionable:—‘Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another: not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord: therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for, in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

‘Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience’ sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute, to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor.

‘Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

‘And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.\*

Read this, and then think of 'exitabilis superstitio!!'—Or, if we be not allowed, in contending with heathen authorities, to produce our books against theirs, we may at least be permitted to confront theirs with one another. Of this 'pernicious superstition,' what could *Pliny* find to blame, when he was led, by his office, to institute something like an examination into the conduct and principles of the sect? He discovered nothing, but that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves a hymn to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but, not to be guilty of theft, robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it.

Upon the words of Tacitus we may build the following observations:—

First; That we are well warranted in calling the view under which the learned men of that age beheld Christianity, an obscure and distant view. Had Tacitus known more of Christianity, of its precepts, duties, constitution, or design, however he had discredited the story, he would have respected the principle. He would have described the religion differently, though he had rejected it. It has been satisfactorily shown, that the 'superstition' of the Christians consisted in worshipping a person unknown to the Roman calendar; and that the 'perniciousness' with which they were reproached, was nothing else but their opposition to the established polytheism; and this view of the matter was just such a one as might be expected to occur to a mind, which held the sect in too much contempt to concern itself about the grounds and reasons of their conduct.

Secondly; We may from hence remark, how little reliance can be placed upon the most acute judgments, in subjects which they are pleased to despise; and which, of course, they from the first consider as unworthy to be inquired into. Had not Christianity survived to tell its own story, it must have gone down to posterity as a 'pernicious superstition;' and that upon the credit of Tacitus's account, much, I doubt not, strengthened by the name of the writer, and the reputation of his sagacity.

Thirdly; That this contempt prior to examination, is an intellectual vice, from which the greatest faculties of mind are not free. I know not, indeed, whether men of the greatest faculties of mind, are not the most subject to it. Such men feel themselves seated upon an eminence. Looking down from their height upon the follies of mankind, they behold contending tenets wasting their idle strength upon one another, with the common disdain of the absurdity of them all. This habit of thought, however comfortable to the mind which entertains it, or however natural to great parts, is extremely dangerous; and more apt than almost any other disposition, to produce hasty and contemptuous, and, by consequence, erroneous judgments, both of persons and opinions.

Fourthly; We need not be surprised at many writers of that age not mentioning Christianity at all: when they who did mention it, appear to have entirely misconceived its nature and character; and, in consequence of this misconception, to have regarded it with negligence and contempt.

To the knowledge of the greatest part of the learned Heathens, the facts of the Christian history could only come by report. The books, probably, they never looked into. The settled habit of their minds was, and long had been, an indiscriminate rejection of all reports of the kind. With these sweeping conclusions, truth hath no chance. It depends upon distinction. If they would not inquire, how should they be convinced? It might be founded in truth, though they, who made no search, might not discover it.

Men of rank and fortune, of wit and abilities, are often found, even in Christian countries, to be surprisingly ignorant of religion, and of every thing that relates to it. Such were many of the Heathens. Their thoughts were all fixed upon other things; upon reputation and glory, upon wealth and power, upon luxury and pleasure, upon business or learning. They thought, and they had reason to think, that the religion of their country was fable and forgery, a heap of inconsistent lies; which inclined them to suppose that other religions were no better. Hence it came to pass, that when the apostles preached the Gospel, and wrought miracles in confirmation of a doctrine every way worthy of God, many Gentiles knew little or nothing of it, and would not take the least pains to inform themselves about it. This appears plainly from ancient history.\*

I think it by no means unreasonable to suppose, that the heathen public, especially that part which is made up of men of rank and education, were divided into two classes; those who despised Christianity beforehand, and those who received it. In correspondence with which division of character, the writers of that age would also be of two classes; those who were silent about Christianity, and those who were Christians. 'A good man, who attended sufficiently to the Christian affairs, would become a Christian; after which his testimony ceased to be Pagan, and became Christian.'†

I must also add, that I think it sufficiently proved, that the notion of magic was resorted to by the Heathen adversaries of Christianity, in like manner as that of diabolical agency had before been by the Jews. Justin Martyr alleges this as his reason for arguing from prophecy, rather than from miracles. Origen imputes this evasion to Celsus; Jerome to Porphyry; and Lactantius to the Heathens in general. The several passages, which contain these testimonies, will be produced in the next chapter. It being difficult, however, to ascertain in what degree this notion prevailed, especially amongst the superior ranks of the Heathen communities, another, and I think an adequate, cause has been assigned for their infidelity. It is probable, that in many cases the two causes would operate together.

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\* Jortin's Disc. on the Christ. Rel. p. 66. ed. 4th.

† Hartley's Obs. p. 119.

CHAP. V.

*That the Christian Miracles are not recited, or appealed to, by early Christian Writers themselves, so fully or frequently as might have been expected.*

I SHALL consider this objection, first, as it applies to the letters of the apostles, preserved in the New Testament; and secondly, as it applies to the remaining writings of other early Christians.

The epistles of the apostles are either hortatory or argumentative. So far as they were occupied in delivering lessons of duty, rules of public order, admonitions against certain prevailing corruptions, against vice, or any particular species of it, or in fortifying and encouraging the constancy of the disciples under the trials to which they were exposed, there appears to be no place or occasion for more of these references than we actually find.

So far as the epistles are argumentative, the nature of the argument which they handle accounts for the infrequency of these allusions. These epistles were not written to prove the truth of Christianity. The subject under consideration was not that which the miracles decided, the reality of our Lord's mission; but it was that which the miracles did not decide, the nature of his person or power, the design of his advent, its effects, and of those effects the value, kind, and extent. Still I maintain, that miraculous evidence lies at the bottom of the argument. For nothing could be so preposterous as for the disciples of Jesus to dispute amongst themselves, or with others, concerning his office or character, unless they believed that he had shown, by supernatural proofs, that there was something extraordinary in both. Miraculous evidence, therefore, forming not the texture of these arguments, but the ground and substratum, if it be occasionally discerned, if it be incidentally appealed to, it is exactly so much as ought to take place, supposing the history to be true.

As a farther answer to the objection, that the apostolic epistles do not contain so frequent, or such direct and circumstantial recitals of miracles as might be expected, I would add, *that the apostolic epistles resemble in this respect the apostolic speeches*; which speeches are given by a writer who distinctly records numerous miracles wrought by these apostles themselves, and by the Founder of the institution in their presence: that it is unwarrantable to contend, that the omission, or infrequency, of such recitals in the speeches of the apostles, negatives the existence of the miracles, when the speeches are given in immediate conjunction with the history of those miracles: and that a conclusion which cannot be inferred from the speeches, without contradicting the whole tenor of the book which contains them, cannot be inferred from letters, which, in this respect, are similar only to the speeches.

To prove the similitude which we allege, it may be remarked, that although in Saint Luke's Gospel the apostle Peter is represented to have been present at many decisive miracles wrought by Christ; and although the second part of the same history ascribes

other decisive miracles to Peter himself, particularly the cure of the lame man at the gate of the temple, (Acts iii. 1.) the death of Ananias and Sapphira, (Acts v. 1.) the cure of Æneas, (Acts ix. 34.) the resurrection of Dorcas; (Acts ix. 40.) yet out of six speeches of Peter, preserved in the Acts, I know but two in which reference is made to the miracles wrought by Christ, and only one in which he refers to miraculous powers possessed by himself. In his speech upon the day of Pentecost, Peter addressed his audience with great solemnity, thus: 'Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know,\* &c. In his speech upon the conversion of Cornelius, he delivers his testimony to the miracles performed by Christ, in these words: 'We are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem.'† But in this latter speech, no allusion appears to the miracles wrought by himself, notwithstanding that the miracles above enumerated all preceded the time in which it was delivered. In his speech upon the election of Matthias,‡ no distinct reference is made to any of the miracles of Christ's history, except his resurrection. The same also may be observed of his speech upon the cure of the lame man at the gate of the temple:§ the same in his speech before the Sanhedrim;|| the same in his second apology in the presence of that assembly. Stephen's long speech contains no reference whatever to miracles, though it be expressly related of him, in the book which preserves the speech, and almost immediately before the speech, 'that he did great wonders and miracles among the people.'¶ Again, although miracles be expressly attributed to Saint Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, first generally, as at Iconium, (Acts xiv. 3.) during the whole tour through the Upper Asia, (xiv. 27. xv. 12.) at Ephesus: (xix. 11, 12.) secondly, in specific instances, as the blindness of Elymas at Paphos,\*\* the cure of the cripple at Lystra,†† of the Pythoness at Philippi,‡‡ the miraculous liberation from prison in the same city,§§ the restoration of Eutychus,|||| the predictions of his shipwreck,¶¶ the viper at Melita,\*\*\* the cure of Publius's father,††† at all which miracles, except the first two, the historian himself was present: notwithstanding, I say, this positive ascription of miracles to Saint Paul, yet in the speeches delivered by him, and given as delivered by him, in the same book in which the miracles are related, and the miraculous powers asserted, the appeals to his own miracles, or indeed to any miracles at all, are rare and incidental. In his speech at Antioch in Pisidia,‡‡‡ there is no allusion but to the resurrection. In his discourse at Miletus,§§§ none to any miracle; none in his speech before Felix;|||| none in his speech before Festus;¶¶¶ except to Christ's resurrection, and his own conversion.

\* Acts ii. 22.

¶ iv. 8.

†† xvi. 16.

\*\*\* xxviii. 6.

|||| xxiv. 10.

† x. 39.

¶ vi. 8.

§§ xvi. 26.

††† xxviii. 8.

¶¶¶ xxv. 8.

† i. 15.

\*\* xiii. 11.

¶¶ xx. 10.

††† xiii. 16.

§ iii. 12.

†† xiv. 8.

¶¶ xxvii. 1.

§§§ xx. 17.

Agreeably hereunto, in thirteen letters ascribed to Saint Paul, we have incessant references to Christ's resurrection, frequent references to his own conversion, three indubitable references to the miracles which he wrought;\* four other references to the same, less direct, yet highly probable;† but more copious or circumstantial recitals we have not. The consent, therefore, between Saint Paul's speeches and letters, is in this respect sufficiently exact: and the reason in both is the same; namely, that the miraculous history was all along *presupposed*, and that the question, which occupied the speaker's and the writer's thoughts, was this: whether, allowing the history of Jesus to be true, he was, upon the strength of it, to be received as the promised Messiah; and, if he was, what were the consequences, what was the object and benefit of his mission?

The general observation which has been made upon the apostolic writings, namely, that the subject of which they treated, did not lead them to any direct recital of the Christian history, belongs also to the writings of the apostolic fathers. The epistle of Barnabas is, in its subject and general composition, much like the epistle to the Hebrews; an allegorical application of divers passages of the Jewish history, of their law and ritual, to those parts of the Christian dispensation in which the author perceived a resemblance. The epistle of Clement was written for the sole purpose of quieting certain dissensions that had arisen amongst the members of the church of Corinth, and of reviving in their minds that temper and spirit of which their predecessors in the Gospel had left them an example. The work of Hermas is a vision: quotes neither the Old Testament nor the New; and merely falls now and then into the language, and the mode of speech, which the author had read in our Gospels. The epistles of Polycarp and Ignatius had for their principal object the order and discipline of the churches which they addressed. Yet, under all these circumstances of disadvantage, the great points of the Christian history are fully recognized. This hath been shown in its proper place.‡

There is, however, another class of writers, to whom the answer above given, *viz.* the unsuitableness of any such appeals or references as the objection demands, to the subjects of which the writings treated, does not apply; and that is, the class of ancient *apologists*, whose declared design it was to defend Christianity, and to give the reasons of their adherence to it. It is necessary, therefore, to inquire how the matter of the objection stands in these.

The most ancient apologist, of whose works we have the smallest knowledge, is Quadratus. Quadratus lived about seventy years after the ascension, and presented his apology to the emperor Adrian. From a passage of this work, preserved in Eusebius, it appears that the author did directly and formally appeal to the miracles of Christ, and in terms as express and confident as we

\* Gal. iii. 5. Rom. xv. 18, 19. 2 Cor. xii. 12.

† 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. Eph. iii. 7. Gal. ii. 8. 1 Thess. i. 5.

‡ See page 71, &c.



could desire. The passage (which has been once already stated) is as follows:—‘The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both they that were healed, and they that were raised from the dead, were seen, not only when they were healed, or raised; but for a long time afterward: not only whilst he dwelled on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a good while after it; insomuch as that some of them have reached to our times.\* Nothing can be more rational or satisfactory than this.

Justin Martyr, the next of the Christian apologists whose work is not lost, and who followed Quadratus at the distance of about thirty years, has touched upon passages of Christ's history in so many places, that a tolerably complete account of Christ's life might be collected out of his works. In the following quotation, he asserts the performance of miracles by Christ in words as strong and positive as the language possesses: ‘Christ healed those who from their birth were blind, and deaf, and lame; causing by his word, one to leap, another to hear, and a third to see: and having raised the dead, and caused them to live, he, by his works, excited attention, and induced the men of that age to know him. Who, however, seeing these things done, said that it was a magical appearance, and dared to call him a magician, and a deceiver of the people.†

In his first apology,‡ Justin expressly assigns the reason for his having recourse to the argument from prophecy, rather than alleging the miracles of the Christian history: which reason was, that the persons with whom he contended would ascribe these miracles to magic; ‘Lest any of our opponents should say, What hinders, but that he who is called Christ by us, being a man sprung from men, performed the miracles which we attribute to him, by magical art?’ The suggestion of this reason meets, as I apprehend, the very point of the present objection; more especially when we find Justin followed in it by other writers of that age. Irenæus, who came about forty years after him, notices the same evasion in the adversaries of Christianity, and replies to it by the same argument: ‘But if they shall say, that the Lord performed these things by an illusory appearance (*φαντασιωδῶς*), leading these objectors to the prophecies, we will show from them, that all things were thus predicted concerning him, and strictly came to pass.§ Lactantius, who lived a century lower, delivers the same sentiment, upon the same occasion: ‘He performed miracles;—we might have supposed him to have been a magician, as ye say, and as the Jews then supposed, if all the prophets had not with one spirit foretold that Christ should perform these very things.’||

But to return to the Christian apologists in their order. Tertullian:—‘That person whom the Jews had vainly imagined, from the meanness of his appearance, to be a mere man, they afterward, in consequence of the power he exerted, considered as a magician, when he, with one word, ejected devils out of the bodies of men, gave sight to the blind, cleansed the leprous, strengthened the nerves

\* Euseb. Hist. i. iv. c. 3.

† Just. Dial. p. 258. ed. Thirlby.

‡ Apolog. prim. p. 48. ed. Thirlby.

§ Iren. i. ii. c. 57.

|| Lactant. v. 3.

of those that had the palsy, and, lastly, with one command, restored the dead to life; when he, I say, made the very elements obey him, assuaged the storms, walked upon the seas, demonstrating himself to be the Word of God.\*

Next in the catalogue of professed apologists we may place Origen, who, it is well known, published a formal defence of Christianity, in answer to Celsus, a Heathen, who had written a discourse against it. I know no expressions, by which a plainer or more positive appeal to the Christian miracles can be made, than the expressions used by Origen; 'Undoubtedly we do think him to be the Christ, and the Son of God, because he healed the lame and the blind; and we are the more confirmed in this persuasion, by what is written in the prophecies: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear, and the lame man shall leap as a hart." But that he also raised the dead; and that it is not a fiction of those who wrote the Gospels, is evident from hence, that, if it had been a fiction, there would have been many recorded to be raised up, and such as had been a long time in their graves. But, it not being a fiction, few have been recorded: for instance, the daughter of the ruler of a synagogue, of whom I do not know why he said, She is not dead but sleepeth, expressing something peculiar to her, not common to all dead persons: and the only son of a widow, on whom he had compassion, and raised him to life, after he had bid the bearers of the corpse to stop; and the third, Lazarus, who had been buried four days.' This is positively to assert the miracles of Christ, and it is also to comment upon them, and that with a considerable degree of accuracy and candor.

In another passage of the same author, we meet with the old solution of magic applied to the miracles of Christ by the adversaries of the religion. 'Celsus,' saith Origen, 'well knowing what great works may be alleged to have been done by Jesus, pretends to grant that the things related of him are true; such as healing diseases, raising the dead, feeding multitudes with a few loaves, of which large fragments were left.† And then Celsus gives, it seems, an answer to these proofs of our Lord's mission, which, as Origen understood it, resolved the phenomena into magic; for Origen begins his reply by observing, 'You see that Celsus in a manner allows that there is such a thing as magic.‡'

It appears also from the testimony of St. Jerome, that Porphyry, the most learned and able of the Heathen writers against Christianity, resorted to the same solution: 'Unless,' says he, speaking to Vigilantius, 'according to the manner of the Gentiles and the profane, of *Porphyry* and Eunomius, you pretend that these are the tricks of demons.‡'

This magic, these demons, this illusory appearance, this compari-

\* Tertull. Apolog. p. 20; ed. Priorii, Par. 1675.

† Orig. Cont. Cels. l. ii. sect. 48.

‡ Lardner's Jewish and Heath. Test. vol. ii. p. 294. ed. 4to.

§ Jerome, cont. Vigil.

son with the tricks of jugglers, by which many of that age accounted so easily for the Christian miracles, and which answers the advocates of Christianity often thought it necessary to refute by arguments drawn from other topics, and particularly from prophecy (to which, it seems, these solutions did not apply), we now perceive to be gross subterfuges. That such reasons were ever seriously urged, and seriously received, is only a proof, what a gloss and varnish fashion can give to any opinion.

It appears, therefore, that the miracles of Christ, understood as we understand them, in their literal and historical sense, were positively and precisely asserted and appealed to by the apologists for Christianity; which answers the allegation of the objection.

I am ready, however, to admit, that the ancient Christian advocates did not insist upon the miracles in argument, so frequently as I should have done. It was their lot to contend with notions of magical agency, against which the mere production of the facts was not sufficient for the convincing of their adversaries: I do not know whether they themselves thought it quite decisive of the controversy. But since it is proved, I conceive with certainty, that the sparingness with which they appealed to miracles, was owing neither to their ignorance, nor their doubt of the facts, it is, at any rate, an objection, not to the truth of the history, but to the judgment of its defenders.

## CHAP. VI.

*Want of universality in the knowledge and reception of Christianity, and of greater clearness in the evidence.*

OF a revelation which really came from God, the proof, it has been said, would in all ages be so public and manifest, that no part of the human species would remain ignorant of it, no understanding could fail of being convinced by it.

The advocates of Christianity do not pretend that the evidence of their religion possesses these qualities. They do not deny that we can conceive it to be within the compass of divine power, to have communicated to the world a higher degree of assurance, and to have given to his communication a stronger and more extensive influence. For any thing we are able to discern, God *could* have so formed men, as to have perceived the truths of religion intuitively; or to have carried on a communication with the other world, whilst they lived in this; or to have seen the individuals of the species, instead of dying, pass to heaven by a sensible translation. He could have presented a separate miracle to each man's senses. He could have established a standing miracle. He could have caused miracles to be wrought in every different age and country. These, and many more methods, which we may imagine, if we once give loose to our imaginations, are, so far as we can judge, all practicable.

The question, therefore, is, not whether Christianity possesses the highest possible degree of evidence, but whether the not having more evidence be a sufficient reason for rejecting that which we have.

Now there appears to be no fairer method of judging, concerning any dispensation which is alleged to come from God, when a question is made whether such a dispensation could come from God or not, than by comparing it with other things which are acknowledged to proceed from the same counsel, and to be produced by the same agency. If the dispensation in question labor under no defects but what apparently belong to other dispensations, these seeming defects do not justify us in setting aside the proofs which are offered of its authenticity, if they be otherwise entitled to credit.

Throughout that order then of nature, of which God is the author, what we find is a system of *benevolence*: we are seldom or ever able to make out a system of *optimism*. I mean, that there are few cases in which, if we permit ourselves to range in possibilities, we cannot suppose something more perfect, and more unobjectionable, than what we see. The rain which descends from heaven, is confessedly amongst the contrivances of the Creator, for the sustentation of the animals and vegetables which subsist upon the surface of the earth. Yet how partially and irregularly is it supplied! How much of it falls upon the sea, where it can be of no use! how often is it wanted where it would be of the greatest! What tracts of continent are rendered deserts by the scarcity of it! Or, not to speak of extreme cases, how much, sometimes, do inhabited countries suffer by its deficiency or delay!—We could imagine, if to imagine were our business, the matter to be otherwise regulated. We could imagine showers to fall, just where and when they would do good; always seasonable, everywhere sufficient; so distributed as not to leave a field upon the face of the globe scorched by drought, or even a plant withering for the lack of moisture. Yet, does the difference between the real case and the imagined case, or the seeming inferiority of the one to the other, authorize us to say, that the present disposition of the atmosphere is not amongst the productions or the designs of the Deity? Does it check the inference which we draw from the confessed benevolence of the provision? or does it make us cease to admire the contrivance?—The observation, which we have exemplified in the single instance of the rain of heaven, may be repeated concerning most of the phenomena of nature; and the true conclusion to which it leads is this: that to inquire what the Deity might have done, could have done, or, as we even sometimes presume to speak, ought to have done, or, in hypothetical cases, would have done, and to build any propositions upon such inquiries against evidence of facts, is wholly unwarrantable. It is a mode of reasoning which will not do in natural history, which will not do in natural religion, which cannot therefore be applied with safety to revelation. It may have some foundation, in certain speculative *à priori* ideas of the divine attributes; but it has none in experience, or in analogy. The general character of the works of nature is, on the one hand, goodness both in design and effect; and, on the other hand, a liability to difficulty, and to objections, if such objections be allowed, by reason of seeming incompleteness or uncertainty in attaining their end. Christianity participates of

this character. The true similitude between nature and revelation consists in this; that they each bear strong marks of their original; that they each also bear appearances of irregularity and defect. A system of strict optimism may nevertheless be the real system in both cases. But what I contend is, that the proof is hidden from us; that we ought not to expect to perceive *that* in revelation, which we hardly perceive in any thing; that beneficence, of which we *can* judge, ought to satisfy us; that optimism, of which we *cannot* judge, ought not to be sought after. We can judge of beneficence, because it depends upon effects which we experience, and upon the relation between the means which we see acting and the ends which we see produced. We cannot judge of optimism, because it necessarily implies a comparison of that which is tried, with that which is not tried; of consequences which we see, with others which we imagine, and concerning many of which, it is more than probable we know nothing; concerning some, that we have no notion.

If Christianity be compared with the state and progress of natural religion, the argument of the objector will gain nothing by the comparison. I remember hearing an unbeliever say, that, if God had given a revelation, he would have written it in the skies. Are the truths of natural religion written in the skies, or in a language which every one reads? or is this the case with the most useful arts, or the most necessary sciences of human life? An Otaheitean or an Esquimaux knows nothing of Christianity; does he know more of the principles of deism or morality? which, notwithstanding his ignorance, are neither untrue, nor unimportant, nor uncertain. The existence of the Deity is left to be collected from observations, which every man does not make, which every man, perhaps, is not capable of making. Can it be argued, that God does not exist, because, if he did, he would let us see him, or discover himself to mankind by proofs (such as, we may think, the nature of the subject merited), which no inadvertency could miss, no prejudice withstand?

If Christianity be regarded as a providential instrument for the melioration of mankind, its progress and diffusion resemble that of other causes by which human life is improved. The diversity is not greater, nor the advance more slow, in religion, than we find it to be in learning, liberty, government, laws. The Deity hath not touched the order of nature in vain. The Jewish religion produced great and permanent effects; the Christian religion hath done the same. It hath disposed the world to amendment. It hath put things in a train. It is by no means improbable, that it may become universal: and that the world may continue in that stage so long as that the duration of its reign may bear a vast proportion to the time of its partial influence.

When we argue concerning Christianity, that it must necessarily be true, because it is beneficial, we go, perhaps, too far on one side: and we certainly go too far on the other, when we conclude that it must be false, because it is not so efficacious as we could have supposed. The question of its truth is to be tried upon its proper evi-

dence, without deferring much to this sort of argument, on either side. 'The evidence,' as Bishop Butler hath rightly observed, 'depends upon the judgment we form of human conduct, under given circumstances, of which it may be presumed that we know something; the objection stands upon the supposed conduct of the Deity, under relations with which we are not acquainted.'

What would be the real effect of that overpowering evidence which our adversaries require in a revelation, it is difficult to foretell; at least, we must speak of it as of a dispensation of which we have no experience. Some consequences however would, it is probable, attend this economy, which do not seem to besit a revelation that proceeded from God. One is, that irresistible proof would restrain the voluntary powers too much; would not answer the purpose of trial and probation; would call for no exercise of candor, seriousness, humility, inquiry; no submission of passion, interests, and prejudices, to moral evidence and to probable truth; no habits of reflection; none of that previous desire to learn and to obey the will of God, which forms perhaps the test of the virtuous principle, and which induces men to attend, with care and reverence, to every credible intimation of that will, and to resign present advantages and present pleasures to every reasonable expectation of propitiating his favor. 'Men's moral probation may be, whether they will take due care to inform themselves by impartial consideration; and, afterward, whether they will act as the case requires, upon the evidence which they have. And this we find by experience, is often our probation in our temporal capacity.\*'

II. These modes of communication would leave no place for the admission of *internal evidence*; which ought, perhaps, to bear a considerable part in the proof of every revelation, because it is a species of evidence, which applies itself to the knowledge, love, and practice of virtue, and which operates in proportion to the degree of those qualities which it finds in the person whom it addresses. Men of good dispositions, amongst Christians, are greatly affected by the impression which the Scriptures themselves make upon their minds. Their conviction is much strengthened by these impressions. And this perhaps was intended to be one effect to be produced by the religion. It is likewise true, to whatever cause we ascribe it (for I am not in this work at liberty to introduce the Christian doctrine of grace or assistance, or the Christian promise, that, 'if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God,†)—it is true, I say, that they who sincerely act, or sincerely endeavor to act, *according* to what they believe, that is, according to the just result of the probabilities, or, if you please, the possibilities of natural and revealed religion, which they themselves perceive, and according to a rational estimate of consequences, and, above all, according to the just effect of those principles of gratitude and devotion, which even the view of nature generates in a well-ordered mind, *seldom fail of proceeding farther*. This also may have been exactly what was designed.

\* Butler's Analogy, part ii. c. vi.

† John vii. 17

Whereas, may it not be said that irresistible evidence would confound all characters and all dispositions? would subvert, rather than promote, the true purpose of the divine counsels; which is, not to produce *obedience* by a force little short of mechanical constraint (which obedience would be regularity, not virtue, and would hardly perhaps differ from that which inanimate bodies pay to the laws impressed upon their nature), but to treat moral agents agreeably to what they are; which is done, when light and motives are of such kinds, and are imparted in such measures, that the influence of them depends upon the recipients themselves? 'It is not meet to govern rational free agents *in viâ* by sight and sense. It would be no trial or thanks to the most sensual wretch to forbear sinning, if heaven and hell were open to his sight. That spiritual vision and fruition is our state *in patriâ*.' (Baxter's Reasons, p. 357.)—There may be truth in this thought, though roughly expressed. Few things are more improbable than that we (the human species) should be the highest order of beings in the universe: that animated nature should ascend from the lowest reptile to us, and all at once stop there. If there be classes above us of rational intelligences, clearer manifestations may belong to them. This may be one of the distinctions. And it may be one, to which we ourselves hereafter shall attain.

III. But may it not also be asked, whether the perfect display of a future state of existence would be compatible with the activity of civil life, and with the success of human affairs? I can easily conceive that this impression may be overdone; that it may so seize and fill the thoughts, as to leave no place for the cares and offices of men's several stations, no anxiety for worldly prosperity, or even for a worldly provision, and, by consequence, no sufficient stimulus to secular industry. Of the first Christians we read, 'that all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need; and, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.\*' This was extremely natural, and just what might be expected from miraculous evidence coming with full force upon the senses of mankind: but I much doubt whether, if this state of mind had been universal, or long-continued, the business of the world could have gone on. The necessary arts of social life would have been little cultivated. The plow and the loom would have stood still. Agriculture, manufactures, trade and navigation, would not, I think, have flourished, if they could have been exercised at all. Men would have addicted themselves to contemplative and ascetic lives, instead of lives of business and useful industry. We observe that Saint Paul found it necessary, frequently to recall his converts to the ordinary labors and domestic duties of their condition; and to give them, in his own example, a lesson of contented application to their worldly employments.

By the manner in which the religion is now proposed, a great por-

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\* Acts ii. 44—46.

tion of the human species is enabled, and of these multitudes of every generation are induced, to seek and to effectuate their salvation, through the medium of Christianity, without interruption of the prosperity or of the regular course of human affairs.

CHAP. VII.

*The supposed Effects of Christianity.*

THAT a religion, which, under every form in which it is taught, holds forth the final reward of virtue and punishment of vice, and proposes those distinctions of virtue and vice, which the wisest and most cultivated part of mankind confess to be just, should not be believed, is very possible; but that, so far as it is believed, it should not produce any good, but rather a bad effect upon public happiness, is a proposition which it requires very strong evidence to render credible. Yet many have been found to contend for this paradox, and very confident appeals have been made to history, and to observation, for the truth of it.

In the conclusions, however, which these writers draw from what they call experience, two sources, I think, of mistake, may be perceived:

One is, that they look for the influence of religion in the wrong place.

The other, that they charge Christianity with many consequences, for which it is not responsible.

I. The influence of religion is not to be sought for in the councils of princes, in the debates or resolutions of popular assemblies, in the conduct of governments towards their subjects, or of states and sovereigns towards one another; of conquerors at the head of their armies, or of parties intriguing for power at home (topics which alone almost occupy the attention, and fill the pages of history); but must be perceived, if perceived at all, in the silent course of private and domestic life. Nay more; even *there* its influence may not be very obvious to observation. If it check, in some degree, personal dissoluteness, if it beget a general probity in the transaction of business, if it produce soft and humane manners in the mass of the community, and occasional exertions of laborious and expensive benevolence in a few individuals, it is all the effect which can offer itself to external notice. The kingdom of heaven is within us. That which is the substance of the religion, its hopes and consolations, its intermixture with the thoughts by day and by night, the devotion of the heart, the control of appetite, the steady direction of the will to the commands of God, is necessarily invisible. Yet upon these depend the virtue and happiness of millions. This cause renders the representations of history, with respect to religion, defective and fallacious, in a greater degree than they are upon any other subject. Religion operates most upon those of whom history knows the least; upon fathers and mothers in their families, upon men-servants and maid-servants, upon the orderly tradesman, the quiet villager, the manufacturer at his loom, the husbandman in his fields. Amongst



such, its influence collectively may be of inestimable value, yet its effects, in the mean time, little upon those who figure upon the stage of the world. *They* may know nothing of it; they may believe nothing of it; they may be actuated by motives more impetuous than those which religion is able to excite. It cannot, therefore, be thought strange, that this influence should elude the grasp and touch of public history: for, what is public history, but a register of the successes and disappointments, the vices, the follies, and the quarrels, of those who engage in contentions for power?

I will add, that much of this influence may be felt in times of public distress, and little of it in times of public wealth and security. This also increases the uncertainty of any opinions that we draw from historical representations: The influence of Christianity is commensurate with no effects which history states. We do not pretend that it has any such necessary and irresistible power over the affairs of nations, as to surmount the force of other causes.

The Christian religion also acts upon public usages and institutions, by an operation which is only secondary and indirect. Christianity is not a code of civil law. It can only reach public institutions through private character. Now its influence upon private character may be considerable, yet many public usages and institutions repugnant to its principles may remain. To get rid of these, the reigning part of the community must act, and act together. But it may be long before the persons who compose this body be sufficiently touched with the Christian character, to join in the suppression of practices, to which they and the public have been reconciled by causes which will reconcile the human mind to any thing, by habit and interest. Nevertheless, the effects of Christianity, even in this view, have been important. It has mitigated the conduct of war, and the treatment of captives. It has softened the administration of despotic, or of nominally despotic governments. It has abolished polygamy. It has restrained the licentiousness of divorces. It has put an end to the exposure of children, and the immolation of slaves. It has suppressed the combats of gladiators,\* and the impurities of religious rites. It has banished, if not unnatural vices, at least the toleration of them. It has greatly meliorated the condition of the laborious part, that is to say, of the mass of every community, by procuring for them a day of weekly rest. In all countries in which it is professed, it has produced numerous establishments for the relief of sickness and poverty; and, in some, a regular and general provision by law. It has triumphed over the slavery established in the Roman empire: it is contending, and, I trust, will one day prevail, against the worse slavery of the West Indies.

A Christian writer,† so early as in the second century, has testi-

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\* Lipsius affirms (Sat. b. i. c. 12.), that the gladiatorial shows sometimes cost Europe twenty or thirty thousand lives in a month; and that not only the men, but even the women of all ranks were passionately fond of these shows. See Bishop Porteus's Sermon XIII.

† Bardesanes, ap. Euseb. Præp. Evang. vi. 10.

fied the resistance which Christianity made to wicked and licentious practices, though established by law and by public usage:—‘Neither in Parthia, do the Christians, though Parthians, use polygamy; nor in Persia, though Persians, do they marry their own daughters; nor among the Bactri, or Galli, do they violate the sanctity of marriage; nor, wherever they are, do they suffer themselves to be overcome by ill-constituted laws and manners.’

Socrates did not destroy the idolatry of Athens, or produce the slightest revolution in the manners of his country.

But the argument to which I recur, is, that the benefit of religion, being felt chiefly in the obscurity of private stations, necessarily escapes the observation of history. From the first general notification of Christianity to the present day, there have been in every age many millions, whose names were never heard of, made better by it, not only in their conduct, but in their disposition; and happier, not so much in their external circumstances, as in that which is *inter præcordia*, in that which alone deserves the name of happiness, the tranquillity and consolation of their thoughts. It has been, since its commencement, the author of happiness and virtue to millions and millions of the human race. Who is there that would not wish his son to be a Christian?

Christianity also, in every country in which it is professed, hath obtained a sensible, although not a complete influence, upon the public judgment of morals. And this is very important. For without the occasional correction which public opinion receives, by referring to some fixed standard of morality, no man can foretell into what extravagances it might wander. Assassination might become as honorable as duelling: unnatural crimes be accounted as venial as fornication is wont to be accounted. In this way it is possible, that many may be kept in order by Christianity, who are not themselves Christians. They may be guided by the rectitude which it communicates to public opinion. Their consciences may suggest their duty truly, and they may ascribe these suggestions to a moral sense, or to the native capacity of the human intellect, when in fact they are nothing more than the public opinion, reflected from their own minds; and opinion, in a considerable degree, modified by the lessons of Christianity. ‘Certain it is, and this is a great deal to say, that the generality, even of the meanest and most vulgar and ignorant people, have truer and worthier notions of God, more just and right apprehensions concerning his attributes and perfections, a deeper sense of the difference of good and evil, a greater regard to moral obligations, and to the plain and most necessary duties of life, and a more firm and universal expectation of a future state of rewards and punishments, than, in any Heathen country, any considerable number of men were found to have had.’\*

After all, the value of Christianity is not to be appreciated by its temporal effects. The object of revelation is to influence human conduct in this life; but what is gained to happiness by that in-

fluence, can only be estimated by taking in the whole of human existence. Then, as hath already been observed, there may be also great consequences of Christianity, which do not belong to it as a revelation. The effects upon human salvation, of the mission, of the death, of the present, of the future agency of Christ, may be universal, though the religion be not universally known.

Secondly, I assert that Christianity is charged with many consequences for which it is not responsible. I believe that religious motives have had no more to do in the formation of nine-tenths of the intolerant and persecuting laws, which in different countries have been established upon the subject of religion, than they have had to do in England with the making of the game-laws. These measures, although they have the Christian religion for their subject, are resolvable into a principle which Christianity certainly did not plant (and which Christianity could not universally condemn, because it is not universally wrong), which principle is no other than this, that they who are in possession of power do what they can to keep it. Christianity is answerable for no part of the mischief which has been brought upon the world by persecution, except that which has arisen from *conscientious* persecutors. Now these perhaps have never been either numerous or powerful. Nor is it to Christianity that even *their* mistake can fairly be imputed. They have been misled by an error not properly Christian or religious, but by an error in their moral philosophy. They pursued the particular, without adverting to the general consequence. Believing certain articles of faith, or a certain mode of worship, to be highly conducive, or perhaps essential, to salvation, they thought themselves bound to bring all they could, by every means, into them. And this they thought, without considering what would be the effect of such a conclusion, when adopted amongst mankind as a general rule of conduct. Had there been in the New Testament, what there are in the Koran, precepts authorizing coercion in the propagation of the religion, and the use of violence towards unbelievers, the case would have been different. This distinction could not have been taken, nor this defence made.

I apologize for no species nor degree of persecution, but I think that even the fact has been exaggerated. The slave-trade destroys more in a year, than the inquisition does in a hundred, or perhaps hath done since its foundation.

If it be objected, as I apprehend it will be, that Christianity is chargeable with every mischief, of which it has been the *occasion*, though not the motive; I answer, that, if the malevolent passions be there, the world will never want occasions. The noxious element will always find a conductor. Any point will produce an explosion. Did the applauded intercommunity of the Pagan theology preserve the peace of the Roman world? did it prevent oppressions, proscriptions, massacres, devastations? Was it bigotry that carried Alexander into the east, or brought Cæsar into Gaul? Are the nations of the world, into which Christianity hath not found its way, or from which it hath been banished, free from con-

tentions? Are their contentions less ruinous and sanguinary? Is it owing to Christianity, or to the want of it, that the finest regions of the East, the countries *inter quatuor maria*, the peninsula of Greece, together with a great part of the Mediterranean coast, are at this day a desert? or that the banks of the Nile, whose constantly renewed fertility is not to be impaired by neglect, or destroyed by the ravages of war, serve only for the scene of a ferocious anarchy, or the supply of unceasing hostilities? Europe itself has known no religious wars for some centuries, yet has hardly ever been without war. Are the calamities, which at this day afflict it, to be imputed to Christianity? Hath Poland fallen by a Christian crusade? Hath the overthrow in France of civil order and security, been effected by the votaries of our religion, or by the foes? Amongst the awful lessons which the crimes and miseries of that country afford to mankind, this is one; that, in order to be a persecutor, it is not necessary to be a bigot; that in rage and cruelty, in mischief and destruction, fanaticism itself can be outdone by infidelity.

Finally, If war, as it is now carried on between nations, produces less misery and ruin than formerly, we are indebted perhaps to Christianity for the change, more than to any other cause. Viewed therefore even in its relation to this subject, it appears to have been of advantage to the world. It hath humanized the conduct of wars; it hath ceased to excite them.

The differences of opinion, that have in all ages prevailed amongst Christians, fall very much within the alternative which has been stated. If we possessed the disposition which Christianity labors, above all other qualities, to inculcate, these differences would do little harm. If that disposition be wanting, other causes, even were these absent, would continually rise up to call forth the malevolent passions into action. Differences of opinions, when accompanied with mutual charity, which Christianity forbids them to violate, are for the most part innocent, and for some purposes useful. They promote inquiry, discussion, and knowledge. They help to keep up an attention to religious subjects, and a concern about them, which might be apt to die away in the calm and silence of universal agreement. I do not know that it is in any degree true, that the influence of religion is the greatest, where there are the fewest dissenters.

## CHAP. VIII.

### *The Conclusion.*

IN religion, as in every other subject of human reasoning, much depends upon the *order* in which we dispose our inquiries. A man who takes up a system of divinity with a previous opinion that either every part must be true or the whole false, approaches the discussion with great disadvantage. No other system, which is founded upon moral evidence, would bear to be treated in the same manner.

Nevertheless, in a certain degree, we are all introduced to our religious studies, under this prejudication. And it cannot be avoided. The weakness of the human judgment in the early part of youth, yet its extreme susceptibility of impression, renders it necessary to furnish it with some opinions, and with some principles or other. Or indeed, without much express care, or much endeavor for this purpose, the tendency of the mind of man to assimilate itself to the habits of thinking and speaking which prevail around him, produces the same effect. That indifferency and suspense, that waiting and equilibrium of the judgment, which some require in religious matters, and which some would wish to be aimed at in the conduct of education, are impossible to be preserved. They are not given to the condition of human life.

It is a consequence of this institution that the doctrines of religion come to us before the proofs; and come to us with that mixture of explications and inferences from which no public creed is, or can be, free. And the effect which too frequently follows, from Christianity being presented to the understanding in this form, is, that when any articles, which appear as parts of it, contradict the apprehension of the persons to whom it is proposed, men of rash and confident tempers hastily and indiscriminately reject the whole. But is this to do justice, either to themselves or to the religion? The rational way of treating a subject of such acknowledged importance is to attend, in the first place, to the general and substantial truth of its principles, and to that alone. When we once feel a foundation; when we once perceive a ground of credibility in its history, we shall proceed with safety to inquire into the interpretation of its records, and into the doctrines which have been deduced from them. Nor will it either endanger our faith; or diminish or alter our motives for obedience, if we should discover that these conclusions are formed with very different degrees of probability, and possess very different degrees of importance.

This conduct of the understanding, dictated by every rule of right reasoning, will uphold personal Christianity, even in those countries in which it is established under forms the most liable to difficulty and objection. It will also have the farther effect of guarding us against the prejudices which are wont to arise in our minds to the disadvantage of religion, from observing the numerous controversies which are carried on amongst its professors, and likewise of inducing a spirit of lenity and moderation in our judgment, as well as in our treatment of those who stand, in such controversies, upon sides opposite to ours. What is clear in Christianity, we shall find to be sufficient, and to be infinitely valuable; what is dubious, unnecessary to be decided, or of very subordinate importance; and what is most obscure, will teach us to bear with the opinions which others may have formed upon the same subject. We shall say to those who the most widely dissent from us, what Augustin said to the worst heretics of his age: *'Illi in vos sæviant, qui nesciunt, cum quo labore verum inveniatur, et quàm difficilè caveantur errores;—qui nesciunt, cum quantâ difficultate sanetur oculus interioris hominis;—qui ne-*

sciunt, quibus suspiriis et gemitibus fiat ut ex quantulâcunque parte possit intelligi Deus.\*

A judgment, moreover, which is once pretty well satisfied of the general truth of the religion, will not only thus discriminate in its doctrines, but will possess sufficient strength to overcome the reluctance of the imagination to admit articles of faith which are attended with difficulty of apprehension, if such articles of faith appear to be truly parts of the revelation. It was to be expected beforehand, that what related to the economy, and to the persons, of the invisible world, which revelation professes to do, and which, if true it actually does, should contain some points remote from our analogies, and from the comprehension of a mind which hath acquired all its ideas from sense and from experience.

It hath been my care, in the preceding work, to preserve the separation between evidences and doctrines as inviolable as I could; to remove from the primary question all considerations which have been unnecessarily joined with it; and to offer a defence to Christianity, which every Christian might read, without seeing the tenets in which he had been brought up attacked or decried: and it always afforded a satisfaction to my mind to observe that this was practicable; that few or none of our many controversies with one another affect or relate to the proofs of our religion; that the rent never descends to the foundation.

The truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts, and upon them alone. Now of these we have evidence which ought to satisfy us, at least until it appear that mankind have ever been deceived by the same. We have some uncontested and incontestable points, to which the history of the human species has nothing similar to offer. A Jewish peasant changed the religion of the world, and that, without force, without power, without support; without one natural source, or circumstance of attraction, influence, or success. Such a thing hath not happened in any other instance. The companions of this Person, after he himself had been put to death for his attempt, asserted his supernatural character, founded upon his supernatural operations: and, in testimony of the truth of their assertions, *i. e.* in consequence of their own belief of that truth, and in order to communicate their knowledge of it to others, voluntarily entered upon lives of toil and hardship, and, with a full experience of their danger, committed themselves to the last extremities of persecution. This hath not a parallel. More particularly, a very few days after this Person had been publicly executed, and in the very city in which he was buried, these his companions declared with one voice that his body was restored to life; that they had seen him, handled him, ate with him, conversed with him; and, in pursuance of their persuasion of the truth of what they told, preached his religion, with this strange fact as the foundation of it, in the face of those who had killed him, who were armed with the power of the country, and necessarily and naturally disposed to treat his follow-

ers as they had treated himself; and having done this upon the spot where the event took place, carried the intelligence of it abroad, in despite of difficulties and opposition, and where the nature of their errand gave them nothing to expect but derision, insult, and outrage.—This is without example. These three facts, I think, are certain, and would have been nearly so, if the Gospel had never been written. The Christian story, as to these points, hath never varied. No other hath been set up against it. Every letter, every discourse, every controversy, amongst the followers of the religion; every book written by them, from the age of its commencement to the present time, in every part of the world in which it hath been professed, and with every sect into which it hath been divided (and we have letters and discourses written by contemporaries, by witnesses of the transaction, by persons themselves bearing a share in it, and other writings following that age in regular succession), *concur* in representing these facts in this manner. A religion which now possesses the greatest part of the civilized world, unquestionably sprang up at Jerusalem at this time. Some account must be given of its origin; some cause assigned for its rise. All the accounts of this origin, all the explications of this cause, whether taken from the writings of the early followers of the religion (in which, and in which perhaps alone, it could be expected that they should be distinctly unfolded), or from occasional notices in other writings of that or the adjoining age, either expressly allege the facts above stated as the means by which the religion was set up, or advert to its commencement in a manner which agrees with the supposition of these facts being true, and which testifies their operation and effects.

These propositions alone lay a foundation for our faith; for they prove the existence of a transaction, which cannot even in its most *general* parts be accounted for, upon any reasonable supposition, except that of the truth of the mission. But the particulars, the *detail* of the miracles or miraculous pretences (for such there necessarily must have been), upon which this unexampled transaction rested, and *for* which these men acted and suffered as they did act and suffer, it is undoubtedly of great importance to us to know. We have this detail from the fountain-head, from the persons themselves; in accounts written by eye-witnesses of the scene, by contemporaries and companions of those who were so; not in one book, but four, each containing enough for the verification of the religion, all agreeing in the fundamental parts of the history. We have the authenticity of these books established, by more and stronger proofs than belong to almost any other ancient book whatever, and by proofs which widely distinguish them from any others claiming a similar authority to theirs. If there were any good reason for doubt concerning the names to which these books were ascribed (which there is not, for they were never ascribed to any other, and we have evidence not long after their publication of their bearing the names which they now bear), their antiquity, of which there is no question, their reputation and authority amongst the

early disciples of the religion, of which there is as little, form a valid proof that they must, in the main at least, have agreed with what the first teachers of the religion delivered.

When we open these ancient volumes, we discover in them marks of truth, whether we consider each in itself, or collate them with one another. The writers certainly knew something of what they were writing about, for they manifest an acquaintance with local circumstances, with the history and usages of the times, which could only belong to an inhabitant of that country, living in that age. In every narrative we perceive simplicity and undesignedness; the air and the language of reality. When we compare the different narratives together, we find them so varying as to repel all suspicion of confederacy; so agreeing under this variety, as to show that the accounts had one real transaction for their common foundation; often attributing different actions and discourses to the person whose history, or rather memoirs of whose history, they profess to relate, yet actions and discourses so similar, as very much to bespeak the same character; which is a coincidence, that, in such writers as they were, could only be the consequence of their writing from fact, and not from imagination.

These four narratives are confined to the history of the Founder of the religion, and end with his ministry. Since, however, it is certain that the affair went on, we cannot help being anxious to know *how* it proceeded. This intelligence hath come down to us in a work purporting to be written by a person, himself connected with the business during the first stages of its progress, taking up the story where the former histories had left it, carrying on the narrative, oftentimes with great particularity, and throughout with the appearance of good sense,\* information, and candor; stating all along the origin, and the only probable origin, of effects which unquestionably were produced, together with the natural consequences of situations which unquestionably did exist; and *confirmed*, in the substance at least of the account, by the strongest possible accession of testimony which a history can receive, *original letters*, written by the person who is the principal subject of the history, written upon the business to which the history relates, and during the period, or soon after the period, which the history comprises. No man can say that this all together is not a body of strong historical evidence.

When we reflect that some of those from whom the books proceeded, are related to have themselves wrought miracles; to have been the subject of miracles, or of supernatural assistance in propagating the religion, we may perhaps be led to think, that more credit, or a different kind of credit, is due to these accounts, than what can be claimed by merely human testimony. But this is an

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\* See Peter's speech upon curing the cripple (Acts iii. 18), the council of the apostles (xv.), Paul's discourse at Athens (xvii. 22), before Agrippa (xxvi.). I notice these passages, both as fraught with good sense, and as free from the smallest tincture of enthusiasm.



argument which cannot be addressed to sceptics or unbelievers. A man must be a Christian before he can receive it. The inspiration of the historical Scriptures, the nature, degree, and extent of that inspiration, are questions undoubtedly of serious discussion; but they are questions amongst Christians themselves, and not between them and others. The doctrine itself is by no means necessary to the belief of Christianity, which must, in the first instance at least, depend upon the ordinary maxims of historical credibility.\*

In viewing the detail of miracles recorded in these books, we find every supposition negatived, by which they can be resolved into fraud or delusion. They were not secret, not momentary, not tentative, nor ambiguous; nor performed under the sanction of authority, with the spectators on their side, or in affirmance of tenets and practices already established. We find also the evidence alleged for them, and which evidence was by great numbers received, different from that upon which other miraculous accounts rest. It was contemporary, it was published upon the spot, it continued; it involved interests and questions of the greatest magnitude; it contradicted the most fixed persuasions and prejudices of the persons to whom it was addressed; it required from those who accepted it, not a simple, indolent assent, but a change, from thenceforward, of principles and conduct, a submission to consequences the most serious and the most deterring, to loss and danger, to insult, outrage, and persecution. How such a story should be false, or, if false, how under such circumstances it should make its way, I think impossible to be explained; yet such the Christian story was, such were the circumstances under which it came forth, and in opposition to such difficulties did it prevail.

An event so connected with the religion, and with the fortunes, of the Jewish people, as one of their race, one born amongst them, establishing his authority and his law throughout a great portion of the civilized world, it was perhaps to be expected, should be noticed in the prophetic writings of that nation; especially when this Person, together with his own mission, caused also to be acknowledged the divine original of their institution, and by those who before had altogether rejected it. Accordingly, we perceive in these writings various intimations *concurring* in the person and history of Jesus, in a manner, and in a degree, in which passages taken from these books could not be made to concur in any person arbitrarily assumed, or in any person except him who has been the author of great changes in the affairs and opinions of mankind. Of some of these predictions the weight depends a good deal upon the concurrence. Others possess great separate strength: one in particular does this in an eminent degree. It is an entire description, manifestly directed to one character and to one scene of things: it is extant in a writing, or collection of writings, declaredly prophetic; and it applies to Christ's character, and to the circumstances of his life and death, with considerable precision, and in a way which no

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\* See Powell's Discourses, disc. xv. p. 245.

diversity of interpretation hath, in my opinion, been able to confound. That the advent of Christ, and the consequences of it, should not have been more distinctly revealed in the Jewish sacred books, is, I think, in some measure accounted for by the consideration, that for the Jews to have foreseen the fall of their institution, and that it was to emerge at length into a more perfect and comprehensive dispensation, would have cooled too much, and relaxed their zeal for it, and their adherence to it, upon which zeal and adherence the preservation in the world of any remains, for many ages, of religious truth might in a great measure depend.

Of what a revelation discloses to mankind, one, and only one, question can properly be asked, Was it of importance to mankind to know, or to be better assured of? In this question, when we turn our thoughts to the great Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and of a future judgment, no doubt can possibly be entertained. He who gives me riches or honors, does nothing; he who even gives me health, does little in comparison with that which lays before me just grounds for expecting a restoration to life, and a day of account and retribution: which thing Christianity hath done for millions.

Other articles of the Christian faith, although of infinite importance when placed beside any other topic of human inquiry, are only the adjuncts and circumstances of this. They are, however, such as appear worthy of the original to which we ascribe them. The morality of the religion, whether taken from the precepts or the example of its Founder, or from the lessons of its primitive teachers, derived, as it should seem, from what had been inculcated by their Master, is, in all its parts, wise and pure; neither adapted to vulgar prejudices, nor flattering popular notions, nor excusing established practices, but calculated, in the matter of its instruction, truly to promote human happiness, and in the form in which it was conveyed, to produce impression and effect; a morality, which, let it have proceeded from any person whatever, would have been satisfactory evidence of his good sense and integrity, of the soundness of his understanding, and the probity of his designs; a morality, in every view of it, much more perfect than could have been expected from the natural circumstances and character of the person who delivered it; a morality, in a word, which is, and hath been, most beneficial to mankind.

Upon the greatest, therefore, of all possible occasions, and for a purpose of inestimable value, it pleased the Deity to vouchsafe a miraculous attestation. Having done this for the institution, when this alone could fix its authority, or give to it a beginning, he committed its future progress to the natural means of human communication, and to the influence of those causes by which human conduct and human affairs are governed. The seed being sown, was left to vegetate; the leaven, being inserted, was left to ferment; and both according to the laws of nature: laws, nevertheless, disposed and controlled by that providence which conducts the affairs of the universe, though by an influence inscrutable, and generally undis-

tinguishable by us. And in this Christianity is analogous to most other provisions for happiness. The provision is made; and, being made, is left to act according to laws, which, forming a part of a more general system, regulate this particular subject, in common with many others.

Let the constant recurrence to our observation of contrivance, design, and wisdom, in the works of nature, once fix upon our minds the belief of a God, and after that all is easy. In the counsels of a being possessed of the power and disposition which the Creator of the universe must possess, it is not improbable that there should be a future state; it is not improbable that we should be acquainted with it. A future state rectifies every thing; because, if moral agents be made, in the last event, happy or miserable, according to their conduct in the stations and under the circumstances in which they are placed, it seems not very material by the operation of what causes, according to what rules, or even, if you please to call it so, by what chance or caprice, these stations are assigned, or these circumstances determined. This hypothesis, therefore, solves all that objection to the divine care and goodness, which the promiscuous distribution of good and evil (I do not mean in the doubtful advantages of riches and grandeur, but in the unquestionably important distinctions of health and sickness, strength and infirmity, bodily ease and pain, mental alacrity and depression) is apt, on so many occasions, to create. This one truth changes the nature of things; gives order to confusion; makes the moral world of a piece with the natural.

Nevertheless, a higher degree of assurance than that to which it is possible to advance this, or any argument drawn from the light of nature, was necessary, especially to overcome the shock which the imagination and the senses receive from the effects and the appearances of death, and the obstruction which thence arises to the expectation of either a continued or a future existence. This difficulty, although of a nature, no doubt, to act very forcibly, will be found, I think, upon reflection, to reside more in our habits of apprehension, than in the subject; and that the giving way to it, when we have any reasonable grounds for the contrary, is rather an indulging of the imagination, than any thing else. Abstractedly considered, that is, considered without relation to the difference which habit, and merely habit, produces in our faculties and modes of apprehension, I do not see any thing more in the resurrection of a dead man, than in the conception of a child; except it be this, that the one comes into the world with a system of prior consciousness about him, which the other does not; and no person will say, that he knows enough of either subject to perceive, that this circumstance makes such a difference in the two cases, that the one should be easy, and the other impossible; the one natural, the other not so. To the first man, the succession of the species would be as incomprehensible, as the resurrection of the dead is to us.

Thought is different from motion, perception from impact: the individuality of a mind is hardly consistent with the divisibility of

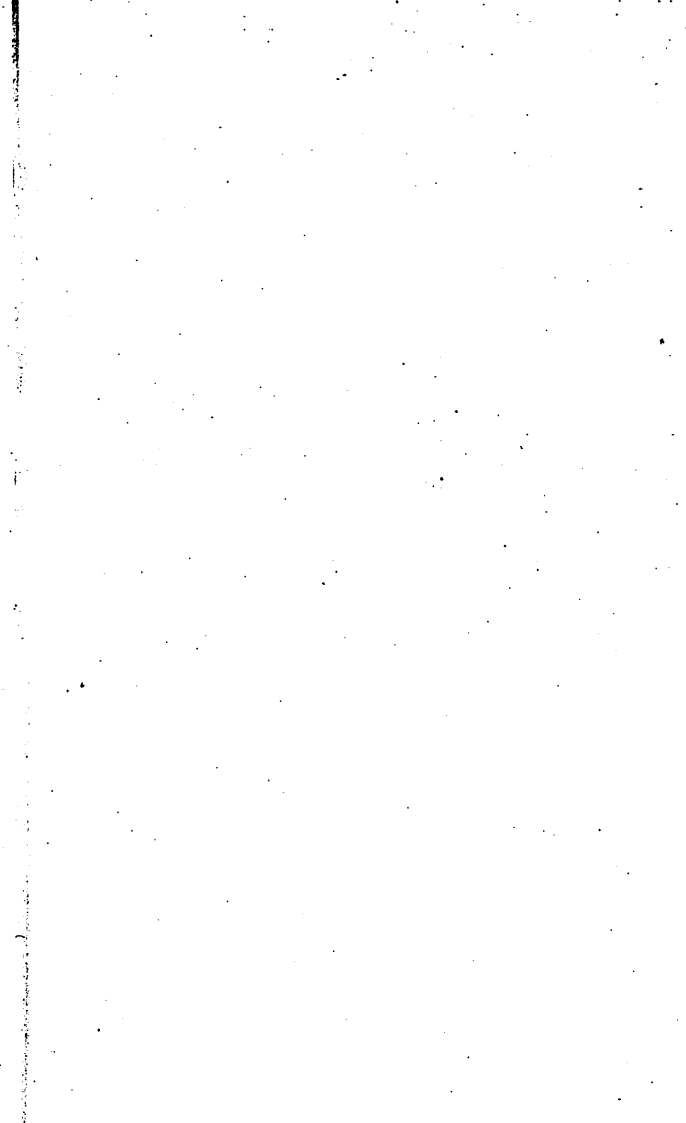
an extended substance; or its volition, that is, its power of originating motion, with the inertness which cleaves to every portion of matter which our observation or our experiments can reach. These distinctions lead us to an *immaterial* principle: at least, they do this; they so negative the mechanical properties of matter, in the constitution of a sentient, still more of a rational being, that no argument drawn from these properties, can be of any great weight in opposition to other reasons, when the question respects the changes of which such a nature is capable, or the manner in which these changes are effected. Whatever thought be, or whatever it depend upon, the regular experience of *sleep* makes one thing concerning it certain, that it can be completely suspended, and completely restored.

If any one find it too great a strain upon his thoughts, to admit the notion of a substance strictly immaterial, that is, from which extension and solidity are excluded, he can find no difficulty in allowing, that a particle as small as a particle of light, minuter than all conceivable dimensions, may just as easily be the depository, the organ, and the vehicle, of consciousness, as the congeries of animal substance which forms a human body, or the human brain; that, being so, it may transfer a proper identity to whatever shall hereafter be united to it; may be safe amidst the destruction of its integuments; may connect the natural with the spiritual, the corruptible with the glorified, body. If it be said, that the mode and means of all this are imperceptible by our senses, it is only what is true of the most important agencies and operations. The great powers of nature are all invisible. Gravitation, electricity, magnetism, though constantly present, and constantly exerting their influence; though within us, near us, and about us; though diffused throughout all space, overspreading the surface, or penetrating the contexture, of all bodies with which we are acquainted, depend upon substances and actions which are totally concealed from our senses. The Supreme Intelligence is so himself.

But whether these or any other attempts to satisfy the imagination, bear any resemblance to the truth, or whether the imagination, which, as I have said before, is a mere slave of habit, *can* be satisfied or not; when a future state, and the revelation of a future state, is not only perfectly consistent with the attributes of the Being who governs the universe; but when it is more, when it alone removes the appearances of contrariety which attend the operations of his will towards creatures capable of comparative merit and demerit, of reward and punishment; when a strong body of historical evidence, confirmed by many internal tokens of truth and authenticity, gives us just reason to believe that such a revelation hath actually been made; we ought to set our minds at rest with the assurance, that in the resources of Creative Wisdom, expedients cannot be wanted to carry into effect what the Deity hath purposed: that either a new and mighty influence will descend upon the human world to resuscitate extinguished consciousness; or that amidst the other wonderful contrivances with which the universe abounds, and

by some of which we see animal life, in many instances, assuming improved forms of existence, acquiring new organs, new perceptions, and new sources of enjoyment, provision is also made, though by methods secret to us (as all the great processes of nature are), for conducting the objects of God's moral government, through the necessary changes of their frame, to those final distinctions of happiness and misery, which he hath declared to be reserved for obedience and transgression, for virtue and vice, for the use and the neglect, the right and the wrong employment, of the faculties and opportunities with which he hath been pleased, severally, to intrust, and to try us.

THE END.



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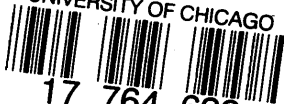
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